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# Imprimatur

Liber cui Titulus, [*The Protestant and  
Popish Way of Interpreting Scripture,  
Impartially compared, &c.*]

June 9.  
1688.

Guil. Needham, RR. in Christo  
Patri ac DD. Wilhelmo Ar-  
chiep. Cant. à Sacr. Domest.

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THE  
PROTESTANT  
AND  
POPISH WAY  
OF  
Interpreting Scripture,  
Impartially compared.  
IN  
ANSWER  
TO  
Pax Vobis, &c. *by M. G. J.*

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LONDON,

Printed for *Walter Kettilby*, at the *Bishop's Head* in  
St. Paul's Church-Yard, 1689.

THE  
PROTESTANT

AND  
REFORMED

CHURCH

OF THE  
NORTH

AMERICAN

CHURCH

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TO THE  
READER.

**I** Was unwillingly engaged in the following Dispute; but at last two or three Sheets were put to the Press, about a Year ago: and then meeting with an unexpected interruption, it lay by so long, till the late great and happy Revolution, seemed to make Discourses of this nature less necessary, than they were, when this was first undertaken. It had therefore perhaps lain for ever unfinished, if I had not met with the Catalogue of Treatises published against Popery in the late Reign; but finding it there named, I thought my self obliged to make good what had been promised for

To the Reader.

*me, though without my knowledge. I have indeavoured to make it as short and plain as I could; and hope I have made it appear, That the Protestant Way of Interpreting Scripture, will give us as much satisfaction, as we need; but that the Papists, upon their own Principles, can be certain of nothing.*

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ERRATA.

**P**Age 20. line 2. for *against* read *amongst*, p. 30. l. 18. for *faleness* read *falseness*.

THE

THE  
PROTESTANT  
AND  
POPIISH WAY  
OF  
Interpreting Scripture, &c.

**W**HEN I first got a sight of the Dialogues that have passed for some time, under the Title of *PAX VOBIS*, I little imagined that after it had lain so long neglected, as it deserves, so much stress should be now laid upon so slight and frivolous a Paper.

It has been hitherto suffered to go up and down without an Answer, not for any difficulty there was in it, but because no man could conceive that the World should ever be deluded by such a thin and manifest piece of Sophistry. The arguing part is apparently fallacious, and the style so very light and vain, that it does but ill become the seriousness of the Matter. Yet I hear these empty toyish Dialogues are esteemed by some absolutely unanswerable; and because he has not yet  
B been

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been thought worth the considering, the Author of them passes with some of his Party for such a mighty Champion, that they begin to believe there is not a Man to be found, hardy enough to look him in the face. When indeed it is nothing but the weakness of his Performance that has hitherto secured him from a Reply; and nothing but the insolent Braggs of his pretended Admirers, can make one necessary, or so much as excusable now. But for fear the Confidence of these Men should prevail upon the easiness and credulity of others, I shall make some short Reflections on the Book it self; and then examine the Fundamental Principle upon which he proceeds; and if that be taken away, all the Cavills, that are built upon it, will fall to the ground of themselves.

The Book was sent abroad under the Mock-Title of *PAX VOBIS*, or *GOSPEL and LIBERTY*: against Antient and Modern Papists. By E. G. Preacher of the Word. It consists of a Preface, and certain Dialogues. And here, if it were worth the while, I might take notice how he hampers himself in a plain contradiction at the very beginning: for in the second Line of the Preface, he bids the Children of the Reformation, to whom it is directed, Reach their hand to receive this Treatise: and the very first words of the Treatise are; I have read your Preface. So that in the learned Preface it is implied that the Treatise was writ first; and in the very entrance of the Treatise it is supposed that the Preface was not only written, but published and read too, before one word of that wise Discourse had passed, which is so notably represented in the seven Dialogues, which make up that much admired and celebrated Treatise. I cannot tell how things may be adjusted; to me the Case seems exceeding intricate, and if a difference should chance

### of Interpreting Scripture.

to arise among the issue of this Author's Brain, about the Rights of Primogeniture, they would stand in need of a more Infallible Judge than himself to determine the Controversie. But this is not the only instance wherein he has shewn himself a Man of wonderful Art, and therefore I shall make no farther Remarks upon it.

The Persons who are brought in speaking, through all the Dialogues, go under the names of *Isaac* and *Ishmael*. *Isaac* is represented like a bold dapper steering Fellow, by Profession, of the Reformed Church, in shew a Libertine, but in reality a downright Papist. *Ishmael* is set up for a kind of an honest simple Church of England Man, that would fain defend himself, if he could; but the other is so pert upon him, and assaults him so briskly at every turn, that the poor thing is utterly confounded; he knows not what to think, but gapes, and stares, as if he were in a perfect maze. *Isaac* is always clattering about his ears with *This and that is Scripture interpreted by such or such a Man of sound Judgment, therefore This and That, or what you please is the Doctrine of the Reformation.* This is the Summ of all he has to say; only he is continually trifling with it, and gives it you over and over again several times, in almost every page of the whole Book. Which is enough to tire the most patient Reader; and to a man of Sense makes no pleasanter Musick than an idle Boy that lyes drumming on the head of an empty Barrell: he only loads your ears with the nauseous Repetition of the same dull insignificant Noise.

He all along affects a certain Pleasantness of humour, as he imagines; but it is indeed no better than meer impertinent Battology. His Drollery is mean and vulgar, without any variety, so much as of the Phrase; there is Nothing in it either sharp or surprizing,



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sing, Nothing that can be any way diverting, but only that *Isaac* is painted always grinning, as well becomes a Person of his Wit and Character; which is the only *Decorum* he has ever observed. It were an easie matter to expose the Man; and if he had not done it sufficiently Himself, make him appear as Ridiculous, as He has endeavoured to represent the *Protestant Rule of Faith*. But so much merriment, which might be excused on some other occasions, would be highly incongruous, if not profane, in so sacred and serious an Argument. He must not therefore expect to be answered according to his Folly. I have often admired, when I have been told with what a strange Applause these Dialogues were received, by some of Those that account Themselves the only Catholicks. But, I must confess, I can scarce believe they could seem agreeable to any, that had the least Sense of True Piety.

The Design is to reduce supposed Hereticks to the Communion of the Church of *Rome*, out of which they think there is no Salvation; and the whole Discourse is concerning the Interpretation of the Holy Scriptures; one of the most weighty Points, and of the greatest importance to our common Christianity; Now to see a Man do nothing but toy and fleer, and not to have so much as one serious Word, all the while He is speaking of so Divine a Subject, as that is, can be approved by None, but Those that have lost very much of that Religious respect that is due to Sacred Things. However, They that are wont to be so exceeding impatient at any thing that does but look like Jestings, and that too, where the Matter is so very Comical that it can scarce be mentioned without provoking a smile; they that cannot indure to hear some pretty Tale, or strange Miracle recited out of their



their own Legends, should at least be so impartial as to admonish their Writers to use greater Caution, and express more Reverence, when they are treating of the Word of God.

But yet, it may be, this Author's Lightness might have been better excused, he might have been patiently suffered to enjoy the pleasure of his Imaginary Victories, if he had brought any thing that look'd like a solid Argument: But the Vanity is unpardonable when he triumphs so gloriously in his own Conceit, laughs at his Adversary, and insults over him with so much Scorn; and yet is not able to bring the least Shew of any substantial Proof against him; Nothing but one slight Threadbare Fallacy, that runs through every Line of the whole Discourse. To make it appear that this is the plain Case betwixt *Isaac* and *Ishmael*, I shall take but a very short View of the Preface and Dialogues; and then consider the Principle upon which his strange Confidence is built.

He begins his *Preface to the Children of the Reformation*, thus: *Be not concerned to know whose Hand it is that holds the Link, but follow the Light it gives: Reach your Hand to receive this Treatise which marks the Shore, where the Ark of our Reformation, shattered by a Deluge of Troubles, may rest; which is a Holy Liberty to all and each Person to believe, or not believe, act or not act as he pleases, with a safe Conscience, according to the Principles of our Reformation.* This is pretty well for the first Stroke. Afterwards He comes to tell you that, *This is the Scope and End of his following Treatise, that, whereas our Rule of Faith, as, says He, I will prove by the unanimous Consent of our whole Reformed Church, is Scripture or God's written Word, as interpreted by each Person of Sound Judgment. — That every one ought to be permitted to believe what He please: — That it is,*  
quite

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quite against the spirit of Reformation to censure, oppose, or blame the Doctrine or Tenets of any Congregation, or of any Doctor of the Reformed Church, because that any Doctrine professed by any Christian Congregation whatever (the Popish excepted) or that ever was delivered by any man of good Judgment of the Reformation, since the beginning of it, until this day, is as truly and really the Doctrine of the Reformation, as the figurative Presence, or Kings Supremacy is. Here he acquaints us with the grand Design of this Noble Undertaking; and the rest of the Preface, and all the Dialogues that follow it, are spent in nothing but idle Descant upon this Principle. That which he is constantly attempting is to make the Reformation look as contemptibly as 'tis possible; and to this purpose he makes choice of an Assertion, which, if rightly understood, we shall not deny; and when he has willfully, I believe, mistaken the meaning of it, he draws a very wise Consequence from it, and then almost splits his Spleen with laughing at this lucky Invention, that came into his head I know not how. But it must be confessed he has taken the most effectual course to render the Reformation sufficiently ridiculous, by dressing it up in his own Coat. But now; Enter Isaac and Ishmael.

pag. 3.

In the first Dialogue his Business is to persuade us, that *It's the Doctrine of the Reformation that we may with a safe Conscience be to day Protestants, to morrow Lutherans; in France Hugonots, in Hungary Antitritonians, in Poland Socinians, and in London of any Religion but Popery.* And now any man would expect that this heavy charge should be made good by some authentick Testimonies of all the Reformed Churches; or at least that it should be shewn out of the Writings of some of their approved Authors. But not a word

word of this; all the proof we can get from him here is, that some of the first Reformers changed their Opinions in some things. And suppose they did; Have not many of the *Ramish* Communion done the same? The English Liturgy has had some few Alterations made in it, since it was first established: And what then? Have not their Breviaries, and Missals, &c. undergone greater Changes than our Book of Common Prayer? This is a very feeble way of arguing, to bring that for a Proof, which indeed is none; or if it were, might be so easily retorted upon himself.

In the second he pursues the same Argument; but still proceeds, as he does from the beginning to the end, upon the mistaken Sense of the Protestant Principle.

Upon which in the Third he will have it a *Doctrine* pag. 25. of the Reformation that any Woman or Trades-man has as much power for to Preach and Administer the Sacraments, as the richest Bishop in England. But to be sure he never forgets his Main Point: Believe what you please. pag. 28.

And in the Fourth he would persuade us, 'tis the *Doctrine of the Reformation* that men may live as they please too; as if we allowed as great a Licentiousness, and Corruption of Manners, as any of the Casuistical Divines of the Church of Rome.

In the Fifth he returns again to his Liberty of Believing any thing; and to fasten this upon us, he produces some scattered imperfect Sentences, which he acknowledges we of the Church of England do not approve of; and these too he generally perverts, directly contrary to the Intent of those very Author's from whence he takes them. And after all for fear these should not be enough to do his business of rendering

dring the Reformation odious and ridiculous, he is fain to pick up, and add to the number of his Quotations, some passages out of notorious Hereticks and Apostates, according to his wonted candour and ingenuity.

pag. 65.

pag. 67.

In the Sixth, He will needs shew you how by the Principles of our Reformation, you can be as good a Papist as the Pope; One Principle excepted: And what that is he tells us afterward: *Believe whatever you please of Popery, provided you believe it, because you judge by Scripture it's true, and not because the Pope or the Church says it; you'll never be a Papist but a Perfect Reformed.* Then He mentions some Things, wherein, He would have us think, the Church of *England*, and some Protestant Writers were perfectly agreed with the Church of *Rome*. But these make but little to his Purpose; for suppose there were no other Points in difference betwixt us; yet there is not one Instance of those he has brought, wherein, when the Authors come to explain themselves farther, He will not find a very great Distance betwixt That which they allow, and the received Doctrine of the *Romish* Church.

pag. 75.

In the Seventh, after some Childish Reflections on the Kalendar, He falls upon the same Subject again, to which the same Answer may be sufficient. But that *Isaac* may shew Himself no Changling, He sticks close to his Beloved Conclusion still: *Believe whatever Doctrine you will, either Popery, Judaism, Protestancy, Arrianism, or what else you please, provided you judge by Scripture it is true, and that you believe it, not because this or that Church, Congregation, or Doctors believe it, but because Yourself judges it to be true, You'll be a true Child of the Reformation.* And when He has spent a little more Chatt upon this, He returns again to proving his Principle; as if he were resolved to torment his Reader with

with endless Repetitions; or that he were conscious to himself that all he had said about it before, was little to the purpose. Then he very gravely tells *Ismael* that *his best Way will be to lay Scripture aside*; pag. 85. and at last he slides into a wild kind of Discourse of *Paganism*. The occasion he takes is this: Dr. *Stillingfleet*, as all Protestants generally do, had charged the Church of *Rome* with Idolatry, and written many things on that Argument, which never yet received any Answer, and I am apt to believe never will. Upon this *Isaac*, who is always ready with his Consequences, infers for us: That *our Land therefore had in Paganism as good a Religion, as it received by Austin in Popery*. This we utterly deny: For if the Religion which was preached here by *Austin the Monk*, had been the very same which is at this day professed in the *Roman Communion*; as it is evident in many particulars it was not; yet, I say, If it had; we should still have thought it far better than the most refined *Paganism*: Because they still retain all the Articles of the Antient Catholick Faith; though mixed with many Corruptions of their own. But if, setting aside what they do preserve of the true Primitive Christianity, the comparison were to be made between *Paganism* and those Additions only they have since tacked on to their Creed; it might then be an employment worthy the Pen of such a Workman as *Isaac*, to let the World understand on which side the advantage lyes. But the Doctor had affirmed that the *Pagans* adored the true God under the name of *Jupiter*; and he that denies it must be very little acquainted with the Heathen Theology, what-ever he be with the Christian. The thing is evident enough from that place in the *Acts*, where *Aratus* is quoted by *S<sup>t</sup> Paul*; and any *Act. 17.* one that will but consult the Poet himself, and the

pag. 86.

ibid.

*Vid. Schol. in Arat.* *Scholiast* upon him, will see he cannot be otherwise understood: and the Doctor had proved it at large, beyond all Contradiction, by great variety of Testimonies out of the best Authors, both ancient and modern: But *Isaac*, who seems to have at least as much aversion for Heathen Greek, as for Heathen Idolatry, very discreetly passes all this over, as if there had not one word been said; and instead of answering, only strives to exercise his Talent in his idle fleeing way; and so sets up the Doctor for a great Advocate of *Paganism*, and thinks that by changing Christianity for it, he may expect to be his Holy Jupiter's High Priest, in London Capitol. And as soon as he had left this sting in the tail, he concludes his Book very abruptly, without so much as bidding his dear *Ismael* Adieu; contrary to all the Laws of *Dialogue*. But if any such Revolution, as he dreams of, should happen, and Heathenism should be restored again, (as it will be none of his fault if it be not) he need not fear any Man's being preferred before him. He would be the fittest Votary for such an Altar: For besides his many excellent personal Qualifications for an *Arch-flamen*, and the particular Services he has done the Cause; Fortune has been always observed to be very prodigal of her favours to such profound Sages as He. If either Merit or good Luck will do the business, 'tis ten to one on *Isaac's* side. For he is so very judicious that he does not perceive that what he objects to the Doctor, reflects no less upon *S<sup>t</sup> Paul*; who, it is plain, understood *Aratus*, as he does; and applied that to the true God which was spoken concerning *Jupiter*. So that all the sport he makes himself about *Paganism* will be found, in the consequence of it, little better than downright Blasphemy. But indeed at his rate of arguing, he may as soon prove whom he pleases a

pag. 90.

Pagan,



*Pagan*, as himself a Christian; by any thing that appears in these *Dialogues*. And of this he seems apprehensive enough; he could not forbear acquainting us what Opinion he thought the World was like to have of him: his own Conscience reminded him what kind of Censures he might justly expect. For, says he: *As to my Religion, I doubt not but that my Readers will be divided in their Judgments of me; if a Papist reads me, he'll swear I am an Atheist; --- if a Protestant, he'll say, I am a Papist, and that my drift is to cast dirt upon his Church; the honest Quaker will say, I am a profane man; others perhaps will say I am of no Religion, but a Despiser of all.* This, I believe, is very rightly guessed: They that read him will be apt to pass such Judgments upon him, as he surmizes; and he knows best, and any one may see, what occasion he has given them to entertain such thoughts of him, but how he will be able to excuse himself from any of these imputations, I leave it to him to be considered of at his leisure.

pag. 66.

There is indeed such a Vein of Profaneness, that discovers it self in the whole contexture of his *Dialogues*, which scarce any one could be guilty of, that were not, what he very reasonably imagines his Readers will think him, a conceited scornful *Despiser of all Religion*. He does so frequently sport himself with an abusive application of Scripture-expressions, that it is hard to judge whether his principal Design were to ridicule the Reformation, or the Bible: But it is certain, the trifling way in which he treats them, argues a very great contempt of both. Every leaf affords us Instances of this; I will mention but one or two. When *Ishmael* was not satisfied that *If a silly Woman, Cobler, or other Trades-men, read Scripture, and give their Sense of it, that must be called the Doctrine*

pag. 24.

ibid.

pag. 83.

of the Reformation: Isaac replies with the greatest seeming Gravity imaginable, but as much real Scorn and Derision as is possible; as his usual manner is: Do not limit God's infinite goodness, by measuring his mercies towards his Creatures, with your narrow apprehensions: Take notice, he says, he has chosen the weak and contemptible of the World, for to confound the strong ones: I confess unto you, Father, that you have hid these things, &c. It is enough to occasion something of horror in any sober Christian, to think that the infinite Goodness and Mercies of Almighty God, and his Holy Word should be thus shamefully exposed by such an idle scoffing Companion. But to omit many more, there is one Passage which, I believe, no Man can read, and I wonder how he could write it without Trembling. *Ismael* had told him plainly: All that your Discourse drives at, by what I can perceive, is either to beat me from the Reformation, by shewing me the absurdity of its Rule of Faith; or oblige me to believe scandalous and blasphemous Tenets, as necessary Sequels out of that Rule. And he cannot deny that that is apparently the Drift of all the impertinent Tattle that makes up his seven Dialogues. But what Answer does *Isaac* give to this? Why, says he, The Lord, who is the Searcher of Hearts, knows, you misconster my Intentions; He makes the most solemn Appeal to the Divine Omniscience, in the most Sacred expressions, for the vouching of that which flatly contradicts his own Conscience. For that can tell him, and that God, whom he invokes so presumptuously, does know, that what he makes *Ismael* to speak, is the very truth; that his whole Discourse is little else but one continued Irony; and that the only Design of it, is to laugh Men out of their Religion, and draw them over to the Church of Rome, by charging the Protestant Rule



*Rule of Faith* with the greatest *Absurdities* he could possibly devise. And he that dares thus boldly call God to witness that which Himself knows, and all the World sees, is most certainly false, seems to have lost all Sense of the Deity, and is advanced some degrees beyond that *Licentiousness*, and *Paganism* too, which he very industriously, though without any Success, strives to prove very easily deducible from the Principles of the Reformation.

After this the uncharitable Censures he passes upon Protestants may seem but a slight and Venial Sin: He that is not afraid openly to affront Almighty God, will be little concerned for the severest, and most unjust Reflections he can make upon his Neighbour. But to shew his kindness, he tells us, that *We are so far from any Smack of Hypocrisie; that you shall not see in all London the least appearance of Vertue.* He that will not discover so much as this, in that Great City, must look upon it with a very spiteful, and malicious Eye. God be praised, there are many Examples there of a truly Sober and Christian Life; and if all be not such, we heartily lament it; though I believe it is no more than other populous Places are guilty of; and if he had pleased, he might as reasonably have levelled the same Objection against all the great Societies of Men in the World. Were I minded to imitate his rash way of Judging, I could requite him with a large Relation of the Lewdnesses, that have been commonly practised in *Rome* itself; and tell him of some Religious Houses, and whole Countreys that have adhered to that Church, where the Looseness of their Lives has been more Catholick, than their Faith; and all this attested, beyond Denial by their own Authors. But I do not like his Pharisaical way of justifying ourselves, by reproaching others.

pag. 41.

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thers. The Scandalous living of some of all Religions, proves nothing effectually; but the great Corruption of humane Nature, that will not always be reformed by any. Therefore to insist upon this, in a matter of Dispute, is but a frivolous thing, at the best; for a true Doctrine will be true still, notwithstanding the unsutable Lives of those that profess it. However I must needs commend *Isaac's* Ingenuity, that was so wise as to understand his own Talent, and having thrust himself into a Controversie, chooses the Weapon he was best able to manage, and so makes Railing serve instead of Argument, and contents himself with aspersing those he cannot confute.

Most of the second hand Quotations, He makes use of, are mustered up upon the same grand Design, of endeavouring to blemish the whole Reformation, by imputing unto it many gross Corruptions, both in Doctrine and Practice. To examin them all would be a very troublesome and unnecessary Labour: for whatever the private Opinions of *Luther* or *Calvin* or any man else may be, we esteem ourselves no more obliged to imbrace them as Articles of our Belief, than He thinks himself bound to receive all the Positions which *Bellarmino*, *Perron*, or the *Sorbonne* have at any time advanced for undoubted Doctrines of the Catholick Church. And to shew you how often he mistakes the Scope of his Authors, and defend their true Sense against his little Cavills, would engage me in so many tedious Digressions, nothing at all to the main Purpose; that I think it very unreasonable that either I or my Reader should be forced to undergo so severe a Penance, for *Isaac's* Impertinence. It may be sufficient therefore only to observe by the way, that many if not all the Passages he has produced out of some Protestant Writers, by which he attempts to discredit their Religion,

Religion, are taken upon trust from Mr. Breerely;  
 and if he had not, by very good Luck, published his  
*Apology*, our *Pax Vobis Dialogues*, as well as some o-  
 thers, had wanted many choice Embellishments. I  
 will give you a Knot of them as they lie together:  
 Musculus a learned Lutheran, writes thus; Thus it is  
 with us at present, that if any be desirous to see a great rabble  
 of Knaves, turbulent Spirits, deceitful Persons, Cozeners,  
 and debauched Men, let him go to a City where the Gospel  
 is purely preached, and he shall find them by multitudes;  
 for it's more manifest than the Day-Light, that never were  
 there more unbridled and unruly People among the Turks  
 and Infidels, than the Professors of the Reformed Gospel.  
 Luther himself says as much; The World grows daily worse  
 and Men are now more Covetous, Revengeful, and Licen-  
 tious than they were in Popery. Mr. Stubbs says no less;  
 After my Travels round about all England, I found the  
 People in most Parts Proud, Malitious, Ambitious, and  
 Careless of good Works. Mr. Richard Gefery, in his Ser-  
 mon at S. Paul's-Cross, Printed Anno 1604. I may free-  
 ly speak what I have plainly seen, that in Flanders never  
 was there more Drunkenness, in Italy more Wantonness,  
 in Jury more Hypocrisie, in Turkey more impiety, in Tar-  
 tary more Iniquity, than is practised generally in England,  
 and particularly in London. I have taken these Four,  
 as I found them all together, without adding or di-  
 minishing a Syllable. In the Margent I have referred  
 to the places in Mr. Breerely where they may be easi-  
 ly seen and compared; and where any one that  
 takes pleasure in discovering Petty-Larciny, and is  
 not unwilling to be at the Trouble, may at any time  
 be furnished with plenty of Instances in the same kind.  
 In these I have chosen out of the rest, Isaac is very  
 careful to keep close to his Voucher, seldom varying  
 in the least from the Translation of the *Apologist*, and

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to be sure never adding a Word more than he found there. And to make it evident, almost to a Demonstration, that he never vouchsafed to consult the Authors themselves; besides the wonderful Harmony betwixt him and *Brerely*, He pitches upon Some which, I am pretty confident, he never saw in all his life. *Luther* and *Musculus* are names that must needs have come to his Ears, and some of their Works, 'tis possible, he may have seen; but for *Stubs* and *Jeffrey* let him affirm, if he dares, that he ever knew any more of them, than what he found laid up to his hand in that common Store-house; and which, to be just to him, he has copied out very faithfully. But for what end he has done it, I cannot conjecture; for suppose that a loose Conversation were, as he imagines, exception enough against the truth of a Doctrine; and that we should confess the charge, which he cannot prove; and that his own Church could plead not Guilty, which, I believe, he will not be over forward to maintain; and that popular Invectives against such Vices, as have been always too common, might be allowed for an exact History of the Times, which no Wise Man, before *Isaac*, ever thought: yet for all this, it must certainly be a piece of the highest Injustice to condemn the present Age, for the sins of their great Grandfathers; and execute the Credit of this Generation, when the youngest Evidence that is brought against it is upward of Fourscore. What pity 'tis that we want a *Brerely* the Second! That M<sup>r</sup> *Stubs* should happen to write in Queen *Elizabeth's* days! and that it should be Eighty four Years, almost compleat, since M<sup>r</sup> *Richard Jeffrey* preached before my Lord Mayor! What hard shifts Men put themselves to, when they are resolved to find any pretence to vilify their Brethren!

OF the 17<sup>th</sup>  
1604.

But

But I shall pass over these, and the other Quotations he has borrowed of Mr. *Brerely*, without any farther inquiry about them; and consider one, which, I believe, is properly his own. He repeats it in almost every Leaf, and it is the main Hinge on which he makes the Controversie to turn; if you rob him of this, you utterly ruine his whole Design. He lays it down boldly for the grand Principle of all the Reformation; and often fixes it in particular upon the Church of *England*; and in one place he tells you it is *in the sixth of our thirty nine Articles*, where he makes us to speak thus: *We have no other Rule of Faith, but Scripture, as each Person of sound Judgment in the Church understands it, and what is proved by it.* In what sense we could admit of this Rule, he has made for us, shall be considered hereafter; in the mean time it must argue a very strange degree of assurance, when a Man can have the face to refer to a particular passage in those *Articles* that are in every ones hands; when it is apparent as the Sun, that there are no such Words, nor any like them, neither in the *Sixth*, nor any other of all the *Thirty nine*. In that he pretends to recite, there is not a syllable of *Each Person of sound Judgment*; the very Subject of it is not concerning the *Interpretation*, but the *Sufficiency of the Scriptures*. For that which our Church teaches us in that place is nothing but this; that *Holy Scripture containeth all things necessary to Salvation: so that what-ever is not read therein, nor may be proved thereby, is not to be required of any man, that it should be believed as an Article of the Faith, or be thought requisite or necessary to Salvation.* The rest of the *Article* tells us only what *Books* we receive for *Canonical*. Now let any one compare the words as I have truly given them, with those that *Isaac* has hammer'd out of his own Brain; and then judge what a trusty

pag. 20.

Art. 6.

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Champion he is like to prove. Really 'tis a very severe Tryal of a man's Patience to be condemned to the drudgery of exposing such shameless palpable forgeries; especially when he constantly treats us with so much Scorn and Derision, as is scarce to be equalled by any thing, but the impudence of the Author, and weakness of his Argument. It may be easily guessed what sincerity he has used in his other Quotations, by the exactness he has shewn in this; where the cheat may be presently detected by every English Reader. And therefore when he makes all other Protestant Churches to maintain the same Principle, I think it may be done with the like Fidelity. I have made some search, and cannot meet with any such Expressions, as he tells us of, in the Confession of any Reformed Church in *Europe*; if he knows where they are to be found, I desire he would be pleased to direct us to the Place. If he refuse me this kindness, as I know he will, then he must excuse us, if we suspect him for dealing fraudulently here too; and look upon him, for ever hereafter, as one that has been set up to ridicule the Protestant Religion, with a few Antick Mimical Tricks, at the expence of his Honour and Conscience.

But if we should be so civil to him, as to grant that he has spoken nothing but Truth; and suppose, for the present, that he had used the same faithfulness in setting down the *Article*, &c. as he has done in transcribing *Mr. Brevelly*; yet I cannot perceive how he will be able wholly to free his own Church, from those very Inconveniences he strives to charge upon Ours. *The Protestant Rule of Faith*, as he says, is *Scripture*, as each Person of sound Judgment understands it. He cannot tell us of one Protestant Church that has express'd it self in these terms. However to gratifie *Isaac*, let it be so: What then? Why then, says



says he, *Whatever any Man of sound Judgment has ever thought to be the Sense of Scripture must be allowed to be the Doctrine of the Reformation.* By the *Man of sound Judgment* he always understands every Protestant of any Denomination whatsoever. And by this Device he thinks he has us fast enough; and imagines that he can make the whole Reformation guilty of the most absurd and contradictory Opinions, that ever were vented, or that he can pretend to have been vented, by any one of all those that have refused Communion with the Church of *Rome*, from *Luther's* time to this day. And are we not like to be finely represented now, when such a slippery Companion as *Isaac* shall not only undertake to make Principles, but must needs be drawing of Consequences for us too? This must be confessed to be something hard, and unequal Dealing; but yet if we should yield him all he desires, and allow that he has laid down the *Protestant Rule of Faith*, with all the sincerity imaginable; and that the Consequence he has drawn from it is firm and undeniable; yet the Church of *Rome* is like to gain but little Advantage by it. For either they have some *Rule of Faith*, in which they are all agreed, or they have not: If they have not, the boast of Infallibility is come to nothing; and they must not pretend any longer to be built upon a Rock: If they have any such *Rule*, then the most absurd and impious Opinions that ever have been maintained by any of those that receive that *Rule*, as all Papists are supposed to do, must be acknowledged to be the Doctrine of the Church of *Rome*; by the same way of arguing that *Isaac* would have the Opinion of every Protestant in the World, to be the Doctrine of the whole Reformation. And then all the lewd, immoral, and licentious Resolutions of their

Casuiſts; all the turbulent Antimonarchical, and Idolatrous Tenents that have been propagated againſt them by any of their Canoniſts, School-men, or other Writers, muſt paſs for the Doctrines of their Church. If it ſhould be replied that they do not think themſelves bound to defend the peculiar Sentiments of private Doctours; becauſe, though the Rule, by which they are to be guided, be never ſo true and certain in it ſelf, yet they, every one of them, may be extremely miſtaken in the application of it: They know that we are wont to plead the ſame thing; this therefore will excuſe Us from the imputation of any ſtrange Opinions, that may have been held by ſome of Our Communion, as effectually as it can free them from the guilt of thoſe dangerous Errours that have been taught, and zealouſly promoted, by the greateſt Men of Theirs. So that hitherto we ſtand, at leaſt, upon equal Terms; nay, I am ſure, any miſ-application of the Rule is far more pardonable in a Church that never thought her ſelf Infallible, than it can be in that that pretends to be ſo.

pag. 22,  
23.

*Iſaac* is ſomething ſenſible that his Argument might be retorted upon him in ſome ſuch manner as this; and therefore he takes all the care he can to prevent the Objection. For, ſays he; *Be pleaſed to obſerve the difference betwixt Popery, and our Reformation; the Rule of Faith in Popery, is Scripture, as Interpreted by the Pope and Council, or their Church; they will admit no other; conſequently no Doctrine is to be called Popery, but what is judged by the Pope, and his Church, or Council, to be the Senſe of Scripture; and if any Doctour, or University holds any Senſe contrary to theirs, it is to be called the Doctrine of that particular Perſon, and not the Doctrine of the Popiſh Church, becauſe their Rule of Faith is not Scripture as interpreted by any Perſon of ſound Judgment,*



ment, but as Interpreted by their Pope, and Council. This is the way by which he thinks to defend the Papists, from the grand absurdity he every where presses upon the Protestants; and this indeed is now become the common Evasion. Tell them of Doctrines that have been generally receiv'd by them; bring the most express Words of their most learned, and approved Authors, the most admired by the People, and encouraged by their Superiours; nay some of them Canonized too; they can easily blow away all these; and whatever any or all of them held, when they please, it shall be but the Opinion of a private Doctor: they will hear of nothing for the Doctrine of their Church, though it has passed never so long, not only without a Censure, but with the highest Approbation, unless we can shew it has been formally confirmed by the great Names of *Pope and Council*. If you talk of any thing less, they make lamentable Complaints of being *Misrepresented*; so that, as the matter has been managed by them of late, it is much easier to confute almost any Point of Popery, than to make them confess what it is. Well! Let us see however how bravely *Isaac* will defend his Church against the force of his own Consequence. *The Protestant Rule of Faith*, says he, *is Scripture as each Person of sound Judgment understands it; therefore whatever Luther or Calvin or any other of sound Judgment, that owns this Rule, have taught or may teach, must be the Doctrine of the Reformation*. This I am forced to repeat so often, is the compleat Epitome of all the seven Dialogues; and if this should not prove good Logick, there is not a Dram of sense in them. To make the Experiment, we will try how the Consequence will fit when 'tis applied to the other side. *The Rule of Faith in Popery*, as *Isaac* tells us, *is Scripture as Interpreted by the Pope and Council*;

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*cil*; Therefore, by his own way of inferring, *Whatever Thomas, or Suarez, or any other of sound Judgment, that owns this Rule, have taught, or may teach, must be the Doctrine of the Church of Rome.* This, I believe, he will be very unwilling to yield; but there's no Remedy, he must be forc'd to do it, by his own Argument. The Inference, from both Rules, is made exactly in the same way; and he that can discern the least Difference must be a Man of a more than ordinary subtilty. If he think to excuse his Church by saying, that their Authors may mistake the Sense of the *Pope and Council*; he cannot be so ignorant, but that he must know that we believe, that ours too may sometimes mistake the sense of the *Scripture*; And he is not so partial but that he may see that the same Answer will bring one side off, as fairly as the Other. But honest *Isaac* is not at all apprehensive of the danger of the desperate stroke he has made; he is perpetually sneering, and seems wonderful jocant; he pleases himself with the conceit that he has caught a Protestant; but I would wish him to have a care it does not prove a *Tartar*. If he will not quietly let go the hold he thinks he has got of the Reformed, he shall quickly understand that he has taken the *Romish Church* in the same Noose. This alone might be sufficient to shew the weakness, and inconsequence of the only Argument he brings against us; if it can do any hurt, it is to none but the Popish Cause, and we have more reason to pity, than to fear such an unskilful and unfortunate Combatant, that directs a furious Blow at his Adversary, that slides off without any harm done, but gives himself a Mortal Wound.

And here I might take my leave of *Isaac*; and dismiss this Argument. But I find the *Interpretation of Scripture* is grown the common Theme upon which many of

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our Popish Writers delight to exercise their Pens. Among other little Essays on the same Subject, I have seen one set out not long since by Mr. P. which because it is so like *Isaac's* in the main Design, I cannot let pass without taking some Notice of it. He calls it, *A full and clear Exposition of the Protestant Rule of Faith. With an excellent dialogue, laying forth the large extent of true Protestant Charity, against the Uncharitable Papists.* This is just such another Mock Title, as his brother *Isaac* had made use of to recommend his Dialogues; and it is the onely one that I find in my Book. But it seems He has several Faces to clap upon this little Treatise, for fear of Discovery. For He tells us in an *Advertisement* at the latter End, that, *He has been obliged to prefix different Titles to this short Discourse.* And what occasion should there be for that I wonder? why, it is, *by reason of the Endeavours he has experienced to be used by Protestant Ministers to keep out of the Peoples hands all Books and Papers, which might contribute to the disabusing a Nation, the most imposed upon this day in Christendome.* If this be all, He had no need of walking in a Disguise; No body had been frightened, if he had appeared in his own Likeness. And as for *keeping Books and Papers out of the Peoples hands*; He knows that their *People* are forbid to look into any of ours, under penalty of a severe Censure; they dare as well read the Bible without Licence, as the Writings of Hereticks. But we that allow and exhort them to study the Scriptures, think that they may there see so much of the truth of the Religion we profess, that we are not afraid to trust them with the perusal of Popish Authors; only advising them not to suffer themselves to be prevailed upon by any specious shew of Argument, without consulting those who may be better able to discern the Fallacy, than they can be generally supposed to be.

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be. But as for Mr. P. he may hereafter save himself the trouble of *different Titles*; if a Man may judge of the rest by this, we need not be solicitous to *keep his Writings out of our Peoples hands*. No; it may be some confirmation to a Protestant in his Religion, when after so much boasting, he shall find so little said against it.

The *full and clear Exposition*, as he calls it, consists of Three Parts. The First, besides some personal Reflections, only acquaints us with some Differences there have been among Protestants, and some hard words some of them have given one another; which if he have related never so impartially, our Cause is no more concerned in it, than his.

The Second he calls, *The Great Extent of Protestant Charity*; Or, a *DIALOGUE between Eudoxius and Philautus, concerning the Protestant Rule of Faith; shewing it to be an Inlet not only to all Heresie, but even to Turcism, Judaism, and Atheism itself*. Here are a great many things boldly undertaken; and you must believe they are all demonstrated in the compass of four Leaves in Quarto. This is something more strange than *Homer's Iliads* in a Nutshell. I guess he might be encouraged to this brave Attempt, by the great reputation that *Isaac* had won before him. *Themistocles* could not sleep sometimes, the Glories of the *Marathonian Field* ran so in his Head. He never mentions his name, but he goes upon the same Principle with *Isaac*: *Scripture as understood by every Sound Judgment*: He argues in the very same way. You shall scarce observe any Difference, but only that he is a great deal shorter, and not quite so Airy; his *Eudoxius* does not prattle altogether so slipantly as *Isaac*. But there is abundant amends made for that; He has out-shot him in his own Bow. I don't remember that *I-*  
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*Isaac* carried the Business any farther than *Paganism*; But Mr. P's *Eudoxius* leads about his Protestant by the Nose, till he has brought him as far as *Atheism*. But I wonder how he drew him thither: The Protestant, He confesses, grounds his Belief only upon the *Word of God*; therefore he may be an *Atheist* and believe there is *no God*.

This is a greater than any of those *Unheard of PARADOXES*, following from the Protestant Rule of Faith; which make up his Third Part. He has Seven of them; just as many as *Isaac's* Dialogues. They are most of them grounded upon extravagant Suppositions concerning Protestants; and if we should grant all to be true, he would gain but little by it. Were we as bad as he would make us; yet the worst men may have right Notions; and the greatest Piety is not always a Preservative against Errour. I need not run over all his *Paradoxes* to shew you the Man; only for Example in his last, among other things almost as groundless, he is so very charitable and wise as to suppose that there *Is nothing so clear, as that the necessity of a handsome Maintenance for Wife and Children, mixt with a fear of being defamed and ruined by the Party, if they leave it; is the Chief Invitation of the Ministers of the Church of England, to remain in her Communion, as, he says, many of them have own'd to him, (some of which he has reconcil'd)* What! *Nothing so clear!* I think I could tell him of some things a little clearer. Through what Window did this Gentleman peep into our Breasts, that he has been able to make such a shrewd discovery of our most private Thoughts? Is this, does he think, *the Chief Invitation*? I presume he has heard, and has been much troubled, no doubt, at what the poor *Waldenses* and *Albigenses*, and other *Hereticks* have suffered in former, and later Ages too;

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Or if he will confine us to the *Ministers of the Church of England*, he knows that some of them heretofore have left their Native Countrey, and all that they had; and some that did not make their escape, were taken by the Writ *de Hæretico comburendo*. But I'll warrant you, this was only to get a *handsome Maintenance for Wife and Children*; or for fear of being defamed and ruined by the Party. Certainly no Man will ever expect that any one should trouble himself to give a formal Answer to such stuff as this: nay, any considering Person of the Church of Rome, will be ready to excuse us, if we should be moved to something of Indignation, to see our selves scandalized, and censured in the most severe and unchristian Manner; when all is bottomed upon nothing, but the most vain, and ridiculous Pretence in the World. As for the *many*, whose Confessions he took; and the *some*, which he *Reconciled*; it would be a mighty satisfaction, if he could be perswaded to present us with a List of their Names: But, I doubt, by this time, they may be slipt out of his Memory.

After he has ended his *Paradoxes*, he looks back upon his Performance, and is so well pleased with it, that he makes a Question, whether *It can be possible, that any Considering, Serious, Sober Christian, reading his Paper with an unbiass'd Mind, and indifferent Reason, should do otherwise than doubt at least, whether the Protestant Rule of Faith may be followed in the perillous Journey of Eternity?* Yes truly, I take it to be very possible; and I am confident, the more any one considers his Paper, the more he will be of my mind. He ends all with a long Story of *An eminent Doctor of the Church of England, very acceptable to the Gentry, that had one of the best Benefices in our Countrey, that had never in his life preached against the Papists but twice, and it was for*  
that



that he had been checked by his Bishop for not doing it; and that still lay upon his Conscience: for you must know that this Eminent Doctour was a Member of a Church he knew to be false, and a Guide to others, in a Way he was sure would never save them. And if he were under such strong Convictions, why did not he then return immediately into that which he thought the right way? Oh! There was one Impediment, viz. A Wife, which he must provide for, and to become a Catholick would ruine his Family. However, upon Mr .P.'s Perswasions, He promised, that the Spring following, he would go to Rome, and do as his Conscience obliged him. But Mr. P. returned soon after into Flanders, and that very Winter the poor Gentleman died without any assistance. This must be confessed to have fallen out very unluckily, upon several accounts. Yet to support the Credit of the Relation, as much as may be, I could wish Mr. P. would acquaint us who this Eminent Doctour was, and where the great Benefice lay; I fear he has forgotten the Names of them both. But I shall not therefore question the truth of the Story; be it as he relates, in every particular, there can be nothing of Argument drawn from it. For we can tell him of Eminent Doctors of the Church of Rome, that have been under great Dissatisfaction of Mind, and some that have come actually over to the Protestant Communion. But what does it signify, if some Men change their Opinions? All Armies will have their Deserters; but which side has the juster Cause, is not to be estimated by such uncertain measures. By these few Instances any one may judge of Mr. P.'s way of proceeding; and what notable Observations he is wont to make upon Us, and our Religion. Therefore what is peculiarly his own, I shall pass over without any farther notice; but what he has in common with Isaac and

others, concerning the *Protestant Rule of Faith*, shall now be considered a little more particularly.

When the Bible began to be commonly translated into the vulgar Languages, it was not possible to keep it wholly out of the Peoples Hands. But to prevent the danger of having her Errors and Innovations discovered by it, the Church of *Rome* will not allow it to be promiscuously read, but only by such as she is pleased to intrust with special Licence for that purpose; and they too must not presume to understand it for themselves, but intirely resign their Judgments to such Interpretation, as she shall be pleased to put upon it. This is indeed an exceeding great degree of Caution, but not a jot more than she stood in need of. For when she had for a long time performed all her publick Offices in an unknown Tongue, and robbed the Laity of half the Communion; when she had introduced a strange Worship of Reliques and Images, and set up to her self many Mediators of Intercession; when she had maintained that Christ was offered every day in the Sacrifice of the Mass, and taught and done many other things, apparently repugnant to the Word of God; then to secure her self in the possession of these Doctrines, and Practices, it was but necessary that she should lay claim to the sole Privilege of Interpreting Scripture. This, and nothing but this, could sufficiently guard her against all Contradiction. For what-ever Exposition she gives of any controverted Place, none must dare to call it in question; though she may have frequent occasion to frame Glosses, directly contrary to the express Letter of the Text. Here she is gotten into an impregnable Fortres; she can never be forced to yield to the clearest Evidence that can be brought, while she is able to make good this unlimited Power, of under-  
standing



standing every thing in her own sense. No wonder then that the *Romanist* contends with so much Zeal, to bear down all with the Judgment of his Church: if he can but gain this one Point, he makes himself Master of all the rest. And I shall not deny, but that his Plea looks speciously enough at the first sight. For when the Contest seems to ly betwixt the private Spirit, and that of the Church, every Man's Modesty will strongly incline him to submit quietly to that venerable Name; and rather think himself mistaken, than that the Church should be in an Errour. And it is true indeed, the Testimony of the Church is very highly to be valued, if by it they understand the Church that is truly Catholick, including the first and purest Ages; but if, by the Catholick Church, they mean, as the *Papists* do, only a part, and that the most corrupt part of the Modern Church; her Testimony or Judgment can be but of very little Authority, especially when she gives it in her own Cause.

We shall not therefore suffer our selves to be overborn in the present Case, by a confident noise of the Catholick Church; but briefly laying down the *Protestant* and *Popish* Ways of *Interpreting Scripture*, endeavour to make it appear, that they are subject to the same Uncertainties that they pretend Us to be.

*The Protestant Rule of Faith*, as *Isaac* will have it, *Is Scripture, as each Person of sound Judgment interprets it*: And Mr. P. expresses it in the same manner. Now, as I have observed before, though *Isaac* often affirm it very boldly, these Words are no where to be found in our Thirty nine Articles; nor yet in the Confession of any other Reformed Church, that I have met with. If he can allow himself the liberty, wilfully to mis-understand our Rule, and then set it  
down

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Pax Vobis.*

down in such Expressions, as he thinks may be best exposed; he may easily make an *Arrian*, or a *Pagan*, or an *Atheist*, or what kind of Creature he pleases, of his poor *Ismael*. 'Tis likely he may have seen the very Words, as he recites them, or some to the same Effect, in some particular Authour; but he cannot therefore justly charge all the Absurdities, he fancies to be in them, upon any one Church, much less upon the whole Body of the Reformation; which is not bound, any more than the Church of *Rome*, to answer for all the Mistakes of every private Member within its Communion. This indeed *Isaac* would fain make us believe; and that any Opinion that ever was started by any Protestant, *Is as truly and really the Doctrine of the Reformation, as the Figurative Presence, &c.* This, he knows, we absolutely deny; but he thinks it necessarily follows from our *Rule of Faith*. I have often taken notice of his Faleness and Insincerity, in representing our Rule in such Words as he pleases himself, which is enough alone to make all he says of no value, with any honest considering Man. But I will not now insist upon that: Let our Rule be just as he would have it; *Scripture as each Person of sound Judgment interprets it*: but then he must give us leave to take the Words in our own sense; and not force an absurd and ridiculous Construction upon them, and then stand laughing by himself, as if he were strangely surprized, as any Man might well be, with the pleasantness of the Invention. If therefore in the present Case, by a *Person of sound Judgment*, he understands such an one as being duly qualified, with natural or acquired Abilities, applies himself seriously to the study of the Holy Scriptures, and understands them in their true and genuine Sense; we freely acknowledge that *Scripture, thus interpreted by any Man, is*  
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*the Rule of our Faith*; and let him make his best of this Concession. But if by a *Person of sound Judgment*, he means such an one as being otherwise rational enough, and of good Capacity, is yet, sometimes at least, mistaken in the sense of the Scriptures; so far as he is mistaken, he cannot be said to be of *sound Judgment*, neither is any one bound to follow him in his Errours. The mistaken sense of Scripture is not our Rule of Faith, who ever be the Interpreter; though he should have the Confidence to pretend himself Infallible. Mr. P. and *Isaac*, and some others, will needs make us understand the matter in this last way; as if, because we may suppose a Man to be of *sound Judgment* in some Respects, we must therefore grant him to be absolutely so in All. Which is either a very childish mistaking, or a most malicious perverting of our Sense; and their whole Argument, which proceeds upon no other ground but this, every Novice can tell them, is a plain Fallacy; à *Dicto secundum quid ad Dictum simpliciter*. And this is all the Advantage they have upon him, and yet they lead their Protestant about in Triumph, as if they had gained an entire Victory; when all the Sophistry they have used, is instantly defeated, by the application of one very common and easy Distinction.

I have now shewed *Isaac's* Falseness and Disingenuity, which is imitated by Mr. P. and others, who have made a *Rule of Faith* for the whole Reformation, and the Church of *England* in particular, which we need not own, in those Terms that they have expressed it: Or if we should, the grand Absurdities they conceit to follow from it, may be easily reflected upon themselves, by their own way of Arguing. But indeed after all, they assault us with nothing but a pitiful Fallacy, which they have framed, by taking the  
Words

Words in such a Sense, as no Protestant in the World did ever allow. This might be enough to silence all the importunate Cavils, with which *Isaac* and his Brethren are wont to trouble us. But the Church of *Rome* thinks they have us here, at a more than ordinary Advantage; and therefore they are perpetually urging us with this, and demanding, with great vehemency, How we are sure that we understand the Scriptures aright? To this we might make a sufficient Reply, by a Counter-Demand, and asking them, How they are sure, that their Church understands them aright, or at least, that they understand their Church? What-ever Answer they shall think fit to give to this, will, I am sure, serve us, as well as them. But for farther satisfaction in this important Point, upon which they so much depend; and that I may not seem rather to evade, than answer their Query; I will first consider the Protestant, and then the Popish *Rule of Faith*; that, by comparing them together, it may appear, whether Theirs affords them such an Infallible Assurance of Belief, as they use to boast of; and whether Ours leaves us in that mighty Uncertainty they are wont to pretend.

Pag. 23.

*Isaac*, in the End of his second *Dialogue*, has summ'd up the whole charge he has against us, in three Propositions. For he tells us, in the Person of a Protestant, of his own creating: *First, Our Rule of Faith is Scripture, not as Interpreted by this or that, but by any Man of sound Judgment: Secondly, It follows hence that the Doctrine of the Reformation must be, and ought to be called what-ever any Man of sound Judgment says is the sense of Scripture: Thirdly, It follows, we may change Religions as often as we please.* These few Lines contain the Substance of all he undertakes to prove, by particular Instances throughout his Book; these are the

these are the things he is always twitting *Ismael* with, and in him the whole Reformation. Mr P. goes upon the same Principle, and his way of arguing is very little different from *Isaac's*; but both of them being manifestly mistaken in their first and fundamental Proposition, as I have shewed; the grand absurdities they charge us with, as following from thence, cannot at all affect us.

To make this appear farther yet, and to prevent all cavilling, that may be occasioned by any ambiguity of expression, we affirm, That *Scripture Rightly Interpreted, is the Protestant Rule of Faith*. This we desire to follow, and no other; this we think sufficient to bring us to Salvation, without the help of Oral, or any kind of Unwritten Traditions. And so by explaining the Term [*By any man of sound Judgment*] by the word [*Rightly*] which is equipollent to it, but cannot be so easily wrested to a wrong sense; it is manifest, that all *Isaac's* idle Drollery, and Mr. P's graver Triumph, must come to nothing; because they both depend wholly upon the equivocal acceptance of one single Phrase. But though we may, without any difficulty, clear our selves from the frivolous Cavils that are taken from the signification, which they would make dubious; yet the great Question still remains; Who they are that may be sure they *Rightly Interpret the holy Scriptures*? The Protestants are persuaded that this may be done by every sober Christian: They of the Church of *Rome*, are of opinion, that no private Man must presume to pretend unto it; but that it is reserved as the peculiar Privilege of the Pope and Council, whom they esteem Infallible. This is what they hold on both sides, as to this matter, and which of these may be safely relied on, in order to the searching out the true sense

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of the word of God, shall be now examined. And first for the Protestant *Rule of Faith*, which is *Scripture Rightly Interpreted*, I will endeavour to prove these three things.

1. That the Holy Scripture is so plain in all things necessary to Salvation, that it may be rightly understood, or Interpreted, by any Man of sound Judgment.

2. That there are certain ways and means, which will not fail to bring those, that duly use them, to a Right understanding, or Interpretation of it, in all those necessary things.

3. That we may be as unquestionably assured of the true sense of Scripture, thus Interpreted, as it is possible for any Man to be of the sense of any other Writing in the World.

If I can prove these things clearly, as I hope to do, then the absurd and ridiculous Consequences, which Mr. P. and *Isaac* would persuade us do follow from the Protestant Rule of Faith, will be of no force.

### I.

The first of these, That the Holy Scripture is so plain, in all things necessary to Salvation, that it may be rightly understood, or Interpreted, by any Man of sound Judgment, is a Proposition, which one would imagine should not be question'd by any Christian. But it is well known how zealous they of the Church of *Rome* have been to prove, that the Scripture is very obscure; as if they would pretend to lead Men to Heaven some other way than that which God has been pleased to reveal unto us in his Holy Word. And so they must, if the additional Articles of their Belief be so necessary to Salvation, as they have



have lately voted they are. For there is not the least mention of any of them in all the Scripture, and some of them are directly contrary to many express Texts. But we that think our selves obliged to follow that Light, which God has there given us, do believe, that he has made us able to see it. We are perswaded that the Scripture may be understood by private Christians :

1. Because God intended it for a perfect Rule of Faith and Practice ; and whoever believes and lives according to what is there revealed and commanded, shall be certainly saved. And if the Scripture be sufficient to bring every Man to eternal Happiness, then every Man may understand it so far as it is necessary for the attainment of that End. Of this there is no controversy among Protestants ; but they of the Church of Rome imagine we stand in need of Unwritten Traditions ; which now by Decree of the Council of Trent are made of equal Authority with the written Word. But the plain testimony the Holy Scripture gives concerning its own fulness and sufficiency, will easily outweigh the bold determinations of a packt Synod. Before God had communicated the clearer manifestation of the Gospel, there was enough revealed in the Law to save those that conscientiously observed it : As is plainly declared by the Prophet *Ezekiel* : *I gave them my Statutes, and shewed them my Judgments, which if a man do he shall even live in them.* And *Moses* himself had enforced the obedience of the *Israelites* upon the very same consideration : *Ye shall therefore keep my Statutes and my Judgments : which if a man do, he shall live in them.* Here is a Promise of Life made to those that should observe the *Statutes and Judgments*, which God gave them by his Servant *Moses* ; which cannot be under-

Sefs. 4.

Ezech. 20. 11.

Lev. 18. 5.

See Rom. 10. 5.  
Gal. 3. 12.

Luk. 10. 25, &c.

2 Tim. 3. 15,  
16, 17.

stood of this temporal Life only, because the best men were often cut off in the midst of their days, and frequently suffered greater adversities than the most profligate Sinners. The Jews therefore have constantly believed, that it had a respect to the Life to come, as well as this. And St. Paul applies it twice in the matter of our Justification; which can have regard to nothing else but the Everlasting Bliss of the other World. And when the Lawyer in the Gospel had made that most important Demand: *Master, What shall I do to inherit eternal Life*: Our blessed Lord refers him to what was written in the Law; and upon his making a sound and judicious Answer, approves of it; and for satisfaction to his Question, tells him, *This do, and thou shalt live*. And the Apostle having commended Timothy for his early knowledge in the holy Scriptures, assures him, that they were able to make him wise unto Salvation: And then adds further, that *All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness: That the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good Works*. And if it be profitable for Instruction, it may certainly be understood; if it will make the man of God perfect, then humane Traditions must be needless and superfluous. There is nothing can be evinced by more plain and express proofs, than that the Scriptures alone contain sufficient directions for the attainment of Everlasting Happiness, and that they were written for that very purpose; and therefore we may conclude, that they are not unintelligible. For it would not be consistent with the Divine Goodness and Wisdom, if he should give us a Rule that were either defective, or obscure; especially in a matter of that infinite concernment. If it should be said, as it is, that all may  
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be cleared by the Interpretation of the Church ; that shall be farther considered hereafter. In the mean time let them take heed , lest while they strive to magnify their Church, they do not reflect dishonourably upon God ; as if he had made the way to Salvation so very dark and intricate, that it is impossible to find it out, unless a Man will resign his whole understanding to the conduct, and management of a certain Church ; which at last, after all the noise and braving we had about it, proves to be nothing in effect, but a private Confessor, or a Parish-Priest ; who by their own Confession may be as blind and ignorant as another man. But let them flatter themselves as they please, with an opinion of some greater Evidence ; we are contented to build our Faith upon the Word of God, which we are fully perswaded may be as safely relied on, and as easily understood, as the Canons, and Decrees of a General Council, or the pretended Infallibility of the Bishop of Rome. For these we know may purposely perplex the truth, and by their Sophistry make the plainest things look very intricate and dubious ; that by this means they may detain the People in such a stupid Ignorance, as may incline them to yield a blind obedience to that boundless authority they would usurp over their Consciences. But we are sure the most wise and gracious God will deal with us in another manner ; he will hide nothing from us that is any way necessary to the Salvation of our Souls ; and therefore those divine Revelations that were given us for that *End*, cannot be so obscure, as they would make them.

2. This will appear farther if we consider that the Holy Scriptures were directed to all ; all are concerned in the Doctrine contained in them ; all are commanded to read, or hear them read ; from whence

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we must necessarily infer, that they may in some measure be understood by all.

It is manifest, that the Holy Scriptures were directed to All. In the Law and the Prophets we find frequent Addresses to the whole *House of Israel*; and most of those Heavenly Discourses of our blessed Lord, that are recorded in the Gospel, were first delivered to the mixt multitude that flocked together to hear him. The Apostolical Epistles, in which are some as difficult passages as in any other part of the written Word, were yet sent, not to some peculiar persons only, distinguished from the rest by the eminency of their place, or the greatness of their abilities; but to the whole Congregation of the Faithful, without any exception. This appears from the Inscription of most of them. That to the *Romans* is not to the Conclave, or any select number, that might pretend to a share in the Infallibility; which had been but reasonable, if St. Paul had known of any such privilege they had above other Churches; but it is to *All that be in Rome, beloved of God, called to be Saints*. The first Epistle to the *Corinthians* is directed *Unto the Church of God which is at Corinth, to them that are sanctified in Christ Jesus, called to be Saints, with all that in every place call upon the name of Jesus Christ our Lord*. And the second is likewise sent *Unto the Church of God which is at Corinth, with all the Saints which are in all Achaia*. And so the rest, they are to the *Churches, the Saints, the Faithful, the Brethren*: which expressions do evidently include the whole community of Christians. And to put this matter out of question, in one of them there is a distinction made betwixt the Clergy and Laity; for it is first, *To all the Saints in Christ Jesus which are at Philippi*; and then is added, *with the Bishops and Deacons*. The Apostle

Rom. 1. 7.

1 Cor. 1. 2.

2 Cor. 1. 1.

Phil. 1. 1.

Apostle here puts a plain difference between these, and the former, and it is manifest, that he applies himself equally to both; which he had never done, if he had not thought them both capable of understanding what he had written. Had he been of the opinion of the modern Romanist, he would have written to none but *the Bishops and Deacons*; and only advised the other *Saints* to repair to their Spiritual Fathers, and take his meaning from them; or rather he would have perswaded them to make a Journey to *Rome*, or stay till a General Council could be convened to give them the true sense of his words. But because we find nothing of this, we may conclude, that he esteemed them able to Interpret for themselves, without yielding an implicit assent to the Judgment of others. And since it is the very same Truth that is now laid before us in the holy Bible, which was first preached to promiscuous Assemblies, that were made up of persons of very different Capacities; if it were plain and effectual enough, as it was, for the conversion and edification of those that heard it, when it was spoken, there is no reason why we should imagine, that it should become less intelligible, meerly by being put into writing.

Besides the Doctrine contained in the holy Scripture, which was thus delivered and sent unto all the Faithful, is of that infinite concernment to every man, as has been intimated already, that no less than our Eternal Salvation depends upon it. For here we have all matters of necessary Belief sufficiently declared; and here we may find the most divine and Heavenly Precepts, by which we are to regulate our actions, in all the various circumstances and conditions of Life. And if we fail in either of these, if we happen to be grossly mistaken in any fundamental Article;

ticle; or if we transgress the Rules of a virtuous and holy conversation, we shall be adjudged to Everlasting Flames, for our Misbelief, or Disobedience. But this were not consistent with ordinary Justice, if the things themselves for which we suffer, were above our apprehensions. No man shall be punished for what was never in his power to prevent. An Ignorance that is absolutely Invincible, must be always allowed for a legal excuse. If private men could not come to a right understanding of the Scriptures, by all the diligence they can use, they could not be justly condemned for acting or believing contrary to them. No Law, or Declaration can be Binding, till it has been sufficiently promulged and made known, to those whose submission, or assent is required to it: So that the Scriptures themselves, if they were not intelligible, could lay no obligation upon us.

But they being of so great and necessary importance, as we are certain they are, to our Eternal Welfare, it has pleased Almighty God strictly to injoin us to read them; and to hear them attentively, when they are read. There is nothing to which the people of the Jewish Church were more particularly, and vehemently exhorted, than the constant and serious study of the Law. *These words which I command thee this day shall be in thine heart. And thou shalt teach them diligently unto thy Children, and shalt talk of them when thou sittest in thine house, and when thou walkest by the way, and when thou liest down, and when thou risest up. And thou shalt bind them for a sign upon thine hand, and they shall be as frontlets between thine eyes. And thou shalt write them upon the posts of thy house, and on thy Gates.* Here is all the care imaginable that can be taken, that the Law should be always in their sight, and in their thoughts; that they should be constantly meditating upon

Deut 6. 6, 7,  
8, 9.



upon it, and wait all opportunities of discoursing about it. And besides this, the Priests were commanded, at certain solemn times, to Read it publicly before all Israel; and to this end they were to Gather Deut. 31. 11, 12. the people together, men, women, and children, and the strangers, or Profelytes, that they might hear, and that they might learn. And according to this excellent institution, when they were come into the promised Land, There was not a word of all that Moses commanded, which Joshua read not before all the congregation of Israel, with the women, and the little ones, and the strangers that were conversant among them. And in the same manner Ezra read in the Book of the Law of Moses, from the morning until mid-day, before the men, and the women, and those that could understand: that is, such Children as were come to years of discretion; all were admitted that were capable of receiving instruction. And this was continued in our Saviours and the Apostles time. Moses, and the Prophets, were read Act. 13. 15. 27. C. 15. 21. in their Synagogues every Sabbath. The same is observed by the Jews to this very day. And when St. Paul writes to the Church of the Thessalonians, he adjures them in the most solemn manner, that they should take care to have his Epistle read to all the holy Brethren. And he commands the Colossians, when they had read his Epistle themselves, to communicate Col. 4. 16. it to be read in the Church of the Laodiceans; and that they likewise should read the Epistle from Laodicea. He uses none of that mighty caution that has been so highly applauded by the Church of Rome. He was not sensible, it seems, of the great danger of making Hereticks, by permitting the Scriptures to be vulgarly read. He was perfectly ignorant of that rare secret, so much boasted of by our modern Empericks, to preserve men from Error, by depriving them of

Jo. 5. 39.

Mark 13. 14.

the means of knowledge. It is plain, that he took the quite contrary course; he ordered those writings that were inspired by the Holy Ghost, to be as publickly and universally read, as was possible. And in this, as in other cases, he did but follow the example of our blessed Lord, who always encouraged Reading; and commanded his hearers to *search the Scriptures*; and sometimes enjoined them particularly to apply their minds, and use their utmost endeavours to find out the meaning of what they read: *Let him that readeth understand.* And this he required in the explication of Prophecies; which are generally more intricate and obscure, than the Precepts of holy Living, or the Historical relations of matters of fact. And yet we see even these are supposed to be intelligible; or else it were very hard to expect that men should read, much less understand them. For indeed if the supposition of the *Romanists*, concerning the obscurity of the Scriptures, were true, their forbidding them to be read, as they do, would not be irrational. But if they are not to be read, why were they written? If they cannot be understood, to what purpose should they be read? It would be very difficult, in the *Romish* way, to give a satisfactory answer to these demands. But certainly God that directed the Scriptures to the whole Body of the Church; that will punish our Ignorance and Disobedience so severely; and that has so strictly commanded the hearing and reading of them, would not express himself in such a manner, as should be above the reach of an ordinary understanding; at least in the most important and necessary points.

3. Nay we find in Scripture many express Appeals made to the People, in which they are left to determine the matter in question themselves; which evidently

dently implies, that they may be able to give a true Judgment in the case. Thus in the Prophet *Ezekiel*: *Hear now; O house of Israel; is not my way equal? are not your ways unequal?* *Ezech. 18. 25.* And so again in *Isaiah*: *O inhabitants of Jerusalem, and men of Judah, Judge, I pray you, between me and my Vineyard.* *Isa. 5. 3.* And our blessed Lord demands of the People; *Yea, and why even of your selves judge ye not what is right?* *Luk. 12. 57.* that is, What is the reason that you that are quick-sighted enough in other matters, do not discern that this is the time, and that I am the Messias that was to come; but you must still be requiring of signs from Heaven; when you might easily convince your selves out of the Scriptures, that have spoken so much concerning me? For that this was the particular subject and occasion of the discourse, may be seen, *Mat. 16. 1.* So that it is plain our Saviour thought, that the People might be competent Judges, in a matter of the greatest consequence. St. Paul in one case, bids them *Judge in themselves.* *1 Cor. 11. 13.* And in another; *I speak, says he, as to wise men: Judge ye what I say.* *Ib. c. 10. 15.* He does not refer it to the Pope and Council, but to all those to whom he wrote. And the thing he treats of, is no less than *the Communion of the body and blood of Christ;* *V. 16.* which we all confess to be one of the greatest Mysteries of our Religion; but the Papists have placed it so far beyond the reach of all humane understanding, that they have loaded it with a thousand palpable contradictions; and yet the Apostle proposes it to the whole Community of the Church of *Corinth*, to whom his Epistle was directed, and commands them to *judge* of what he was to say about it. Our Saviour and all the Apostles usually confirmed their Doctrine by the testimony of the Law and the Prophets; and *Apollas* *Ag. 18. 28.* mightily convinced the Jews, and that publicly, shewing

*by the Scriptures, that Jesus was Christ.* And in these cases they did certainly leave their Hearers to judge of the true sense of the Scriptures they propounded unto them. For it were ridiculous to go about to bring men out of their errors, without giving them the liberty to consider the force and evidence of the arguments we make use of; and it is utterly impossible to convince them, by that they cannot understand. Nay, they of the Church of *Rome*, after their vehement and copious invectives against a private Interpretation, are forced at last to allow of it themselves. For when they would prove their peculiar opinions, as they have in vain attempted, by some passages taken out of the Scriptures, they do by this make the People Judges of the sense of those places, and permit them to determine whether they think them pertinently applied. So that not only the Scripture, but the *Romanists* too do the same thing, which they are wont so superciliously to condemn in us.

4. But we may immediately put an end to this debate, by consulting the Text of the Holy Scripture; where we shall find all things necessary, so clearly delivered, that an ordinary capacity may be able to discover those Truths, which being sincerely followed, will certainly bring us to Everlasting Happiness. These are in the general of two sorts; either matters of Practice, or matters of Faith: they hold their Church to be absolutely Infallible in both. As to the former of these, they do not esteem themselves concerned to be altogether so difficult. Though their Casuists especially, by their mental Reservations; their directing the Intention; their frequent eluding the dictates of natural Conscience, by some nice and frivolous distinction; and many other Devices, have not only obscured, but quite evacuated a great part of

of our Moral Duty, as effectually as ever the Scribes and Pharisees did ; yet they will not always contend so zealously with us, about the things of this nature. Though they have a very plentiful stock of confidence to maintain the most absurd assertions ; yet they are ashamed openly to defend the lewd opinions of many of their most celebrated Authors. Because they have debauched mens minds with such false notions in morality, as would be abhorred in the most barbarous parts of the Heathen World. Therefore leaving these Writers to shift for themselves, and the People to be conducted by them, if they please, they dare not so roundly deny, but that God has revealed himself evidently enough, as to what concerns our Practice ; but as to matters of Faith, there it is that they think the Scriptures the most defective and obscure ; and that there is an absolute necessity of having them supplied by their Traditions, and explained by their pretended Catholick Church. But as whatsoever we are bound to do, is almost confessed to be manifestly contained in the word of God ; so we are perswaded, that every thing, of necessary Belief, is to be found there too ; and that in such clear and perspicuous expressions, that nothing but obstinacy and perverseness, can be able to deny it. To make this good, I might run over all the Articles of our Christian Faith ; the Incarnation, Death, and Resurrection of our blessed Lord, the Forgiveness of Sins, and the rest ; and shew how every one of them is confirmed by plain and undeniable testimonies of holy Scripture. But the thing is so generally known, and so very clear, that I need not insist upon it. Indeed the case is very different, as to that Creed which *Pius* the Fourth has framed from the Decrees of the Council of *Trent* ; and which is now received by the Church

Church of Rome. If we were to seek for a proof of the Power of Indulgences; the Sacrifice of the Mass; the seven Sacraments; the Praying to Saints; the worshipping their Reliques, and Images, and the like; we might look long enough, before we should meet with any passage in the whole Bible, that would give the least countenance to these novel and superstitious Inventions. But whatever is to be found in any of the Creeds that were allowed by the Antient Church, may be fully proved out of the Scriptures; and our Adversaries themselves cannot deny it.

Now if the Scripture was intended for a perfect Rule of Faith and Manners; if it was directed to all, and all are concerned, and commanded to read it; if it appeals to the People, and leaves them to judge of what is said; and if we find all the precepts of a holy Life, and all the Articles of our Christian Faith manifestly laid down and declared in it, then it must be so plain in all necessities, that it may be understood, or *Interpreted by any man of sound Judgment.*

It were easy to prove by a multitude of citations out of the Antients, that they were all of this opinion; I shall only produce a few very plain passages from some of the most eminent of them. *Justin Martyr* in his Dialogue with *Trypho* the Jew, tells him, that he would produce such *Scriptures*, \* *as no body should be able to speak against*; they should be so clear and express for the Divinity of Christ, which he is there proving. And a little after he bids him † *Attend to those things he was about to recite out of the holy Scriptures, which had no need of being Explained, but only heard.* *St. Chrysostome* finds fault with his Hearers, and reprehends them sharply, for their neglect of the

\* Ἀδύνατον  
ἵσθαι δύνη-  
σαι. *Just.*  
*Mart. Dial.*  
*cum Tryph. p.*  
174.

† Περὶ ἧς  
τοιγαῦν οἱ  
μὴ ἀνα-  
μνηστικῶς  
ἀπὸ τοῦ ἀγί-  
ου γερῶν  
ὡς ἐκζητῶντα θεωροῦν, ἀλλὰ μόνον ἀκούσαντες εἶδ.



holy Scriptures; and because they were so addicted to the pleasing their fancies, that they did not think it worth their while to come to Church, unless it were to hear a Sermon. This, he tells them, did spoil all. For it was only their carelessness and want of attention to the word of God, when it was read, that made the Preacher necessary. \* *For what is it,* says he, *that there is need of a Sermon? All things are clear and easy in the holy Scriptures; All the necessary things are plain.* There cannot be a more convincing testimony to shew how far this great and pious man differed in his Judgment, from the present Church of Rome. He thought the Scripture so very plain in all necessary things, that it needed no Interpreter; but that the People, if they were attentive, might understand it so well, that it were far better they should want a Sermon, than not have it publicly read, in their Religious Assemblies. The Romanists, on the other side, are willing to imagine, that the Scripture is so extremely obscure, that no man must dare to understand it; but be bound to give himself up to the sense of the Church, whether he knows what that is, or no. They will not allow the Laity to read it privately without Licence; but they do not suffer it to be publicly read at all; the People hear no more of it at the Church, in their own Language, but a few shreds and incoherent Sentences, which the Priest may be pleased, now and then, to scatter among them, in some of his popular Discourses, from the Pulpit. This is never to be reconciled to St. Chrysostom's Doctrine; and St. Austin is as express as he, to the same purpose. In his Epistle to Volusianus, when he is mentioning the great depth of the Scriptures, and that there were many Mysteries in them, that could scarce be unfolded, and fully understood;

though

\* *Διὰ τὴν γὰρ  
διευκρίαν καὶ  
πᾶσα εὐρίη  
ἡ σοφία τῶν  
κατὰ τοὺς  
δαίμονες γεν-  
ταὶς πᾶσι  
τα ἀποκαλύ-  
πτων. Chrys.  
in 2. Thess.  
Rom. 3.*

\* Non quod ad ea que necessaria sunt salutis, tantum in eis perveniatur difficultate. August. ad Volusian. Epist. 3.  
 † Ea que aperta continent quasi amicus familiaris sine furo ad cor loquitur indoctorum atque doctorum. Ibid.  
 \* In iis que aperte in scriptura posita sunt, inveniuntur illa omnia, qua continent fidem moresque vivendi. Aug. de Doct. Christian. lib. 2. c. 9.

though a man of the best Judgment, and quickest apprehension should study them never so diligently all his Life; lest any one should extend this too far, he puts in an exception, and assures us; \* *That the knowledge of those things in them that were necessary to Salvation, was to be attained without any such great difficulty.* And afterwards he tells us, † *That the Scripture speaks those plain things which are contained in it, like a familiar Friend without disguise, to the heart of the unlearned, as well as the Learned.* To pass over divers others, there is one place, in the same Father, that does so positively determine the point, that it must not be omitted on this occasion. \* *In what is clearly laid down in the Scripture, all those things are found which concern Faith and a good Life: which is certainly all that is required of us.* I might add a great many more testimonies unto these; but I take these to be so very clear and apposite to the present question, that they may be sufficient alone to weigh down all the pretended Authorities that can be brought to the contrary.

There are two places especially that are wont to be the most speciously objected against this Doctrine; One is: 2 Pet. 3. 16. Where we are told, that in St. Paul's Epistles are some things hard to be understood, which they that are unlearned and unstable, wrest, as they do also the other Scriptures, unto their own destruction. This is the Text that is the most insisted on; but it has been often, and very lately fully cleared; but because it lies so directly in my way, I am obliged to take some notice of it. We say therefore, that this is spoken only of St. Paul's Epistles; and restrained to some things in those Epistles; and these are only said to be hard, but not impossible to be understood, unless we will resign our selves to a supposed Infallible Guide.

And

See Texts cited  
 by Pap. Examin.  
 pag. 27.  
 &c.

And then these *Hard* places are *wrested*: there is a forced and false meaning put upon them. But by whom is this done? by the *Unlearned and unstable*; such as were neither well skilled, nor well settled in the Christian Faith. And they dealt in the same manner with the other Scriptures, that were not *hard to be understood*. For there is nothing so plain, which may not be easily perverted by a weak and fickle Judgment; when another that is better informed, and more piously resolved, may be able to see the true sense through a dark expression. Besides, if we suppose these *Hard things* absolutely necessary to Salvation, 'tis likely the same Doctrines are clearly taught in other places; and then we may be ignorant of the more obscure, without the hazard of our eternal welfare. But if they be necessary, and no where else to be learnt, St. Peter is scarce to be excused, that has neither explained them himself, nor directed us to that unerring Church, which, as they endeavour to make us believe, is the only one upon earth, that is intrusted with the power and ability to do it. So that the Scripture may be plain enough still in all necessities, for what appears from this first place.

The other is in the same Epistle; and if we attend only to the sound of the words, it may seem, at first hearing, to be directly levelled against private mens attempting to understand the Scripture. For *no Prophecy of Scripture is of any private Interpretation*. So our English Translation renders it; but the vulgar Latin is in this place less ambiguous, *The Prophecy of Scripture is not made by a man's own Interpretation*. That is, The holy Penmen being inspired, did not write of their own heads; they did not Interpret their own minds, but the mind of God. That this is the intent of the place, is plain from the following words: *For*

*Prophetia Scripturæ a propria Interpretatione non fit.*

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the Prophecy came not in old time by the will of man : but holy men of God, spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost. With this agrees the Explication of a learned Jesuit ; one that is particularly famous for his elaborate Commentaries on the Bible : *The Apostle*, says he, proves, that the Prophetical Word is the more firm and valid ; and that we ought diligently to apply our minds unto it ; because that Prophecy is not the word of the Prophet, but of God, who is the first and infallible Truth. This is the thing he says ; The Prophecie of Scripture is not made by a man's own Interpretation : i. e. It is not of his own Invention, as if the Prophet of himself should bring to light, interpret, and explain hidden and future things, by the sharpness of his own wit : For as Philo says in his Book concerning Rewards and Punishments , The Prophet is God's Interpreter , by whom he delivers us his Oracles. That this is the sense, appears from the reason which St. Peter explaining himself, does immediately subjoin. For the Prophecy came not, &c. The Evidence of Truth extorted this free Exposition from the Pen of a Jesuit. He afterwards, to serve the Popish Cause, makes an attempt to draw it another way ; and would have it to argue against mens *Interpreting* Scripture by their own understandings. It is a great advantage indeed that these men have above the Hereticks ; if when they have given one sense of a place, and proved it to be agreeable to the scope of the Text, they may take the liberty to clap in another, quite different from the former. At this rate they are never like to want Scripture-proofs, for any thing their occasions may require ; not excepting the worship of Images, or the Sacrifice of the Mass, the Pope's Infallibility, or what they please. But if the first Explication be true, as it is certainly here , the other is not only impertinent, but false. These objections therefore

Probat Propheti-  
cum Sermo-  
nem esse firmio-  
rem, eiq; studio-  
se nos debere in-  
tendere ex eo,  
quod Prophetia  
non sit Sermo  
Prophetae, sed  
Dei, &c. Corn.  
à Lap. in loc.

therefore do not overthrow the Perspicuity of the Scriptures.

This notwithstanding we do not deny; but that there may be many passages very obscure. But seeing those that are plain are sufficient for our necessary instruction, the different apprehensions we may have about the obscure ones cannot indanger our Salvation. And God has thus ordered it, in his infinite Wisdom, as is conceived by very pious and judicious men, that what is plain might suffice to direct our lives; and what is obscure might serve to whet and exercise our industry; and prevent that foolish contempt that men are apt to have for easy things. But because the Fathers sometimes speak of great mysteries, and difficulties that are in the Scriptures; the Popish Writers generally lay hold on these expressions, and extend them a great deal farther than they intended. When they find any mention of some things that are obscure, they will needs infer, that all are so; and either willfully overlook, or disingenuously suppress those other places, in which it is acknowledged, that whatever is necessary is plain; some of which I have now produced. But though the things may be never so plain in themselves, yet this will not always secure us from being mistaken. Negligence and inadvertency may betray men into errors in the plainest Cases. Want of care may cause us to stumble and fall in the smoothest way.

II.

To avoid this, there are certain ways and means which will not fail to bring those, that duly use them, to a right understanding or Interpreting the Scripture, in all those plain necessary things. It is not my de-

sign here to lay down all those Rules which may be useful to us in the Exposition of Scripture ; but only to touch upon some things, which being carefully observed , will by God's Blessing secure us from all damnable errors, and give us that knowledge which shall be sufficient to the saving of our Souls. These I shall divide into preparatory dispositions, which will be requisite for all those that intend seriously to search the Scriptures; and immediate helps, that will be of great use, when we actually apply our selves to the study of them.

When we intend seriously to search into the sense and meaning of the holy Scriptures, we must come with such preparatory dispositions of mind and affections, that there may be nothing in us that may any way obstruct the discovery of the Truth. We must come therefore with a freedom from prejudice; with an earnest desire to learn; with a steady Resolution to obey; and with hearty Prayers for a Blessing upon our indeavours.

1. When we read the Scripture, we should do it with a mind perfectly free from all prejudice. We must not suffer our selves to be so far prepossessed with any opinion we may have taken up, as to become unwilling to part with it, whenever it shall appear, that there is more evidence on the other side. We should examine every thing with an absolute impartiality and indifferency of Judgment; and be always ready to yield our assent to the strongest arguments, though they should happen to be never so contrary to any of our former persuasions. He that reads and considers with such an unbiassed mind, is the most likely to apprehend things, as they are in themselves; but all prejudice corrupts the Judgment, and inclines it to determine, according to the opinion  
that



that it has already imbraced : Like an Eye that is troubled with a suffusion, it tinctures every object it looks upon with its own colour. If an *Arrian* be resolved in his Heresy, he will force any expression to seem to back it ; and make a shift to evade the most undeniable Authorities that can be brought for the Divinity of our blessed Lord ; and a *Socinian* will be more irreclaimable than he. If a Papist be fully bent upon his unconceivable Doctrine of Transubstantiation, and think himself bound to fall down and adore the Consecrated Wafer ; he will stick close to *Hoc est Corpus meum*, and never be driven from his literal sense ; though himself confess there are figurative expressions in some of the words of Institution ; though the Fathers affirm those to be so ; though St. *Paul* calls the Elements by the name of Bread, several times in the same Chapter ; and though the point he maintains so zealously be pressed with infinitely more absurdities and contradictions, than ever could be charged upon the grossest superstitions of any of the Heathens ; yet all is to no purpose ; you shall never persuade him, he will deny his Sense, and Reason, and Fathers, and Scriptures, and any thing, rather than part with his monstrous Notion. This is a known and pregnant instance, of the strange power of Prejudice ; but indeed the Fancy they have generally entertained that their Church is Infallible, and that they are bound to understand the Scripture no otherwise. But as they are Interpreted by that Church, is enough alone, if they be true to it, to secure all those of the Roman Communion, from ever being convinced, by the clearest Texts that can be possibly alledged. Other prejudices may be able to blind the Judgment in some particular Cases, but this will do it effectually in All. If they are but told, that the thing has been determined by

by her Authority, they will run headlong upon the most manifest absurdities, and disbelieve their own senses, before they will question the credit of their Church. This conceit makes them venture upon the worship of Images, in spite of the second Commandment; and keep up their Prayers in an unknown tongue, notwithstanding whatever St. Paul can say to the contrary. For next to the not reading them at all, their reading them with such a prejudice, is the most certain way never to come to any true knowledge of the Scriptures. He that would understand them aright, must read them with a free and unbiassed Judgment.

2. And not only so, but he must likewise have an earnest desire to learn. He that is cold and indifferent, makes himself unworthy of the truth; but an ardent affection shews what a value we have for it, quickens our indeavours after it, and is one of the best qualifications we can have for the attainment of it. St. Chrysostom thinks this of it self may be sufficient: *We have, says he, a very loving Master, and when he sees that we are solicitous, and that we express a great desire of understanding the Divine Oracles, he does not suffer us to stand in need of any thing else; but presently enlightens our minds, and gives us illumination from himself, and according to his gracious wisdom, implants the whole true Doctrine in our Souls.* To this he applies the words of our Saviour; *Blessed are they which do hunger and thirst after righteousness, for they shall be filled.* God who has been pleased to make a very plentiful provision for our outward necessities, will not be backward in the supply of our spiritual wants. He that has stored the World with Meat and Drink, for the gratification of those sensitive Appetites he has implanted in us, will certainly take care to satisfy that

ἐπιλεόντων  
ἔχουεν δ' ἐσ-  
πότην καὶ ἰ-  
πιδαν ἰδὼν  
μεριμνήσας  
ἡμᾶς, καὶ πῶ-  
θον πολὺν ἡ-  
πιδεικνυμένων  
Cyc. Chryl. in  
Gen Hom. 24.

Mat. 5. 6.

that desire of knowledge, which is the most natural and vehement, as well as the most noble and divine passion of the reasonable Soul.

3. But to this desire we must add a steady resolution to obey, whatever we shall learn. When we affect to be informed, only to humour a vain Curiosity, or please our selves with an opinion of our great skill and insight into the Mysteries of Religion, without any farther design; this is something like the longing of our first Parents after the Tree of Knowledge. This was the main occasion of all the antient Heresies; and among these the Gnosticks, that took their very denomination from Science, were some of the first and greatest corrupters of the Christian Doctrine. Such as these are wont not only to run into many foolish and absurd errors, but their Lives are generally as licentious as their Opinions. And this being so directly opposite to the grand intent of God's revealing his mind unto us, they that refuse to obey his Will, do thereby make themselves incapable of understanding it; or if they do understand it in some measure, they quickly over-power it by some false conceits of their own. For experience will tell us, that a vicious Life, does by degrees, destroy the very Principles by which we should act; and that both by its own natural tendency, and the just Judgment of God. Thus those lewd persons the Apostle speaks of, though they had no other light but that of nature to guide them; yet because they held so much of *the truth*, as was imparted unto them, *in unrighteousness*; therefore they became vain in their imaginations, and their foolish heart was darkened. Professing themselves to be wise, they became fools. And so they that should be imposed upon by the lying wonders, and pretended Miracles of that wicked one; the reason of it is given; *Because they*

See Rom. 1.  
v. 17, 18, &c.

2 Thess. 2. 10,  
received 11.

received not the love of the truth, that they might be saved. And for this cause God shall send them strong delusion, that they should believe a lie. For as we are told  
 2 Tim. 3. 13. in another place, Evil men and seducers shall wax worse and worse, deceiving and being deceived. Errors in practice are apt to breed mistakes in Judgment; and perverseness in the will, ordinarily produces blindness in the understanding. But he that is sincere and conscientious in the discharge of his Duty, takes the most effectual course to improve his knowledge. So our Saviour declared to the Jews: If any man will do his will, he shall know of the Doctrine, whether it be of God, or whether I speak of my self. Holiness of Life is one of the best means of right Information; and if we are ignorant of what is necessary for us, it must proceed chiefly from the prevalency of our sinful passions. For, as one has told us very truly, all things in the holy Scripture are clear to all those that will come to the holy word, with a mind religiously disposed. That is, all such as are sincerely resolved to obey the truth which they shall there discover.

Πάντα γὰρ  
 σαφὴ ἐν τῇ θείᾳ  
 γραφῇ τοῖς  
 βουλευμένοις ἐν  
 σεβῇ λόγου  
 σμῶ περιεργα-  
 ζέσθαι τὸ θεῖον  
 λόγον. Epi-  
 phan. Hæres.  
 76.

Psal. 119. 12.  
 26. 64. 68.  
 124. 135.  
 V. 18.  
 V. 73.

Jan. 1. 5.

4. And to this resolution we must join our hearty Prayers for a blessing upon our indeavours. We are bound to beg our daily Bread of Almighty God, and we ought much more, and with greater earnestness, to pray unto him for our spiritual food. David petitions him several times, in the same Psalm, in the very same words: Teach me thy Statutes. And again, Open mine eyes, that I may behold wondrous things out of thy Law. And, Give me understanding, that I may learn thy Commandments. Here we have the Example of a devout and holy Man, praying frequently for the Divine assistance in the study of his Duty; and St. James assures us expressly, that such Prayers as these, shall be certainly heard: If any man lack Wisdom, true Heav-  
 evenly

venly *Wisdom*, let him ask of God, that giveth to all men liberally, and upbraideth not ; and it shall be given him. Not that we are to expect any new Revelations; for all this *Wisdom* is already revealed in the holy Scriptures; And so modified, as St. *Austin*

\* expresses it, that there is no man that may not from thence draw, that which is sufficient for him, if he do but come to draw it forth, with Piety and Devotion, as true Religion requires. We must make our humble addresses to the God of all Mercy and Truth; and he will surely give us that Grace,

\* *Inest omnino veritas, & re-  
ficiendis instaurandisq; animis  
accommodatissima disciplina: &  
planè ita modificata, ut nemo  
inde haurire non possit, quod sibi  
satis est, si modò ad hauriendum  
devotè ac piè, ut vera Religio  
poscit, accedat.* Aug. de Uti-  
lit. credend. Cap. 6.

which will both inable us to subdue our corruptions, and to gain so much knowledge of his holy will, as shall be necessary for the attainment of Eternal Happiness.

If therefore we come to them without prejudice, with a serious desire to know the truth, and a firm resolution to obey it, and add to all, our devout Prayers to Almighty God for his gracious assistance, we are in some measure fitly prepared, for a right understanding of the holy Scriptures.

But besides these preparatory dispositions, there are some immediate helps, that will be of great use, when we actually apply our selves to the study of them: Such as diligent and attentive reading, considering the main scope and design of the Texts, comparing of places, distinguishing betwixt proper and figurative expressions; consulting with the Learned and Judicious, and the like.

1. The first and most general of these is diligent and attentive reading. St. *Paul* commands *Timothy*, 1 Tim. 4. 13. to give attendance to reading. And St. *Chrysostome* esteems this to be as much as is requisite, for the understanding the Writings of that great Apostle. He acquaints his hearers what a particular zeal he had

Καὶ οὐαὶ ἐν  
 δὶ λελήσῃ μὴ δὲ  
 περὶ οὐμῶν  
 περὶ αὐτῶν τῶν  
 ἀπαργυρίων,  
 ὡς αὐτοὶ ἐτίθει  
 δὲ οὐβήσας· αὐ  
 λευδὸς γὰρ  
 ἂν τῷ χειρῶ  
 λόγῳ, &c.  
 Chryl. Procem.  
 in Epist. ad  
 Rom.

for his Epistles, and that the skill he had in these, was not owing to any extraordinary parts, or acuteness of judgment; but to his being continually conversant in them. And you, says he, if ye will apply your minds carefully to reading, will want nothing else. For the word of Christ cannot deceive us, which says, seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you. He thinks this enough, and he grounds his opinion upon the promise of our Saviour. And indeed this is so universally confessed, to be absolutely necessary, to the finding out the sense of any Author whatsoever; that the Romanists must be allowed the sole glory of that wonderful Invention, of teaching the people the true Interpretation of the Scripture, by forbidding them to read it.

2. But we who do not only allow, but earnestly recommend the reading of it, should when we read, seriously consider the main scope and design of the Text; what connexion the words may have with what goes before, and with what follows; by whom, and to whom they were spoken; at what time, and upon what occasion; with any other material circumstances that may fall under our observation, which will often prove the best Key, to let us into the true sense of the place. But that we may at least avoid all dangerous Errours in the Interpretation of any part of the Holy Scripture, we should be constantly mindful of the great intent for which it was written; which was certainly no other, but the promoting of real Piety; or the love of God and our Neighbour; as St. *Austin* \* shews at large. And there-

\* Quisquis igitur Scripturas divinas, vel quamlibet earum partem, intellexisse sibi videtur, ita ut eo intellectu non adificet istam geminam charitatem Dei, & proximi, nondum intellexit. Quisquis verò talem inde sententiam duxerit ut huic adificandæ charitati sit utilis, non tamen hoc dixerit, quod ille quem legit eo loco sensisse probatur, non perniciosè fallitur — ita fallitur ac si quisquam errore deſerens viam, eo tamen per agrum pergat quo via illa perducit. Aug. de Doct. Chriſt. l. 1. c. 36.



fore, says he, whoever thinks he understands the holy Scriptures, or any part of them, in such a sense as does not promote this twofold love of God and our Neighbour; he does not yet understand them. But whoever shall from thence gather such a sense, as is useful to the promoting of that Love, and yet should not speak the sense of the Author in that place; in this case, he is not in a pernicious Error, but only in such a one, as a man would be, that should through mistake leave the road, and yet go on to the same place, the road leads to, by crossing a field. Such mistakes as these are very innocent, and no way prejudicial to our Salvation: For though we may happen to misapprehend some passages we would ground it upon, yet our opinion is in it self pious and true. And it is certain what the same Author tells us in another place, that *\*when there may be not one, but two or more senses gathered out of the same words of Scripture, though it be not known what was the sense of him that wrote, there is nothing of danger, if it can be proved out of other places of the holy Scriptures, that every one of those senses is agreeable to the truth.* So that as the considering the scope of them, will lead us into the meaning of many particular Texts; so the having the main intent of the Scriptures always in our Eye, may preserve us from being dangerously mistaken in any.

*\*Quando ex eisdem Scripturæ verbis, non unum aliquid sed duo vel plura sentiantur etiam si latet quid senserit ille qui scripserit, nihil periculi est, si quodlibet earum congruere veritati ex aliis locis sanctorum scripturarum doceri potest.*  
Aug. de Doct. Christi. lib. 3. c. 27.

3. After this we should carefully compare several places, and expound the more difficult, by those that are plain and express. For as St. Basil observes, *Those things that seem to be ambiguous, and obscurely spoken in some places of the holy Scripture, are explained by those that are confessed to be clear in other places.* St. Austin is perfectly of the same mind; and tells us, *\*That the Scri-*

*Τὰ ἀμφίβολα καὶ ἠσαρκωμένως λεγόμενα ἐν τοῖς ἁγίοις τοῖς διότιναις ἐν τοῖς ἁγίοις*

*ὅσα ἄλλα ἐν τοῖς ἁγίοις ἀποκαλύπτει σαφηνίζονται.* Basil Reg. Brev. Resp. ad Interrog. 267. *\* Scriptura hoc in promptis, quod in reconditis habet.* Aug. ad Voluf. Ep. 3.

pture contains the same things in those places that may be readily understood, which it does in the most abstruse:

† Nihil ferè ex illis obscuritatibus eruitur, quod non planissimè dictum alibi reperitur. Aug. de Doct. Christ. lib. 2. c. 6.

\* Ad obscuriores locutiones illustrandas, de manifestioribus sumantur exempla, &c. Ib. c. 9.

† Aperta & manifesta eligimus. Quæ si in sanctis scripturis non invenirentur, nullo modo esset unde operirentur clausa, & illustrarentur obscura. Aug. de Unit. Eccl. c. 6.

† That there is nothing almost to be gotten out of the obscure passages, which may not be found most clearly delivered elsewhere.

And therefore he frequently lays down such directions as these: \* That examples should be chosen from the more plain and manifest, for the illustration of the more obscure forms of speech; and some testimonies, the meaning of which is certain, that may take away our doubting concerning the uncertain.

This he thinks so necessary, † That if there were not plain and clear places to be found in the holy Scriptures, there would be no means left by which we could possibly open and illustrate the obscure ones. He accounts it the only way to Interpret Scripture by Scripture; and expound the difficult passages, by those that are plain and easy. I might transcribe a great deal more out of the same Author, to the same effect; but this I have purposely set down in his own words, as an instance of our agreement with the antient Writers of the Church, in this Case, as well as others that are in dispute; and to shew, that the Romanists, that are continually making their loud brags of the Authority of the Fathers, are the men that do the most contradict them.

4. Another help for the better understanding the Scriptures, is the distinguishing betwixt proper and figurative expressions. If this be not carefully observed, it may quickly betray us into many gross and ridiculous Errours. And here the most general Rule is, That where the literal is manifestly absurd or impious, there the words are always to be taken in a figurative sense. Of this St. *Austin* (whom I have had occasion

occasion frequently to mention, especially his Books *de Doctrina Christiana*, where he treats designedly of the Interpretation of Scripture) gives us a very unfortunate Instance, for the Church of

*Rome.* \* Except ye eat the flesh of the Son of Man, and drink his blood, ye have no life in you. This, sayes he, seems to injoin a very wicked and heinous thing. Therefore it is a Figure, commanding us to communicate of the Passion of the Lord, and with delight and profit, to lay up in our memory, that his Flesh was Crucified and wounded for us. He looks upon

\* Jo. 6. 53. Nisi manducaveritis, &c. Facinus aut flagitium videtur jubere. Figura est ergo, praeceptum passioni Domini esse communicandum, & suaviter atq; utiliter recordandum in memoria, quid pro nobis caro ejus crucifixa & vulnerata sit. Aug. de Doct. Christi. l. 3. c. 16.

it as a horrible and flagitious crime, as indeed it was, to eat the Flesh, and drink the Blood of our Saviour in a literal sense. We see how far he was from thinking, that the Elements in the Lord's Supper, did undergo any Transubstantiating change. And they that will not be perswaded by this, and many other reasons, that the words are to be understood Figuratively, are perfectly beyond the power of conviction. And if others were resolved to be as obstinate as they, it were impossible to confute the most monstrous opinion. It might be easily maintained, that our Saviour was a material Door, or a Vine; that St. Peter was a Rock of Stone; and his Successor, by consequence, could be no better. The *Anthropomorphites* would be the best disputants in the World, and prove demonstratively, that Almighty God had Hands and Arms, Eyes and Ears, properly so called; that he was exactly of humane shape; and that the Divine Image consisted in this external resemblance. If no Absurdities can force men to depart from the literal sense, when they are pleased to be stiff; if others should take the same liberty, there would be no way of reducing such Hereticks, but by throwing good store of

of *Anathema's* among them, as they are wont to do that have nothing else to plead for themselves; they may have some hopes to confute their Adversaries with Curses, but never by Argument.

5. If when we have observed such Rules as these, there should yet remain any difficulties unresolved, the best way that is left to clear them, will be to consult with the Learned and Judicious; those whose chief study and imployment it is, to inquire into the true sense of the holy Scriptures. By this means many intricate and dubious places may be quickly explained, which might otherwise seem inexplicable. As it is commonly practised in other Cases: Whatever kind of knowledge it be that men desire to gain; that they may the more easily attain it, and in the greater perfection, they are wont to advise with the most expert Masters in their several Professions. To these those that have opportunity may add many other helps; such as skill in the Original Languages; examining the most Authentick Translations, both antient and modern; acquainting themselves with Jewish and Christian Antiquities; getting some insight into Ecclesiastical History, Fathers, Councils, and the best Authors of later times; that have written either purposely, or occasionally on this subject. We exclude nothing that may be any way serviceable to the right understanding of the Text. After all, there may remain some Chronological accounts, some propheticall Predictions, and other obscure passages, which we may not be able fully to unfold, by these, or any other methods.

## III.

But as to all necessary points, we may be as unquestionably assured of the true sense of Scripture, thus Interpreted, as it is possible for any man to be, of the sense of any other Writing in the World. For if the Scripture be so plain, as I have shewed, in all things necessary to Salvation, that it may be understood by any man of an ordinary capacity, then if we come to it with a mind rightly disposed, willing to learn and to do our Duty; and make use of such helps as I have named; we may certainly be sure that we do so far understand it; or else we can never be sure that we understand any thing. Suppose the question should be concerning *Livy's* History, or *Tully's* Offices; and a man should read these very diligently, observe their main scope and design, consider their Stile and Phrase, and where he met with any difficulty, in such case advise with the most Learned and Skillful Grammarians; upon this he might be sufficiently assured that he understood the mind of his Authors, at least in the most clear and perspicuous passages. And he would be judged very troublesome and impertinent, that should tell him that all his pains were to little purpose; he could never be certain but that he might be mistaken, for want of the direction of an Infallible Guide. There may indeed be some places in these and other Writers, where the best Critics may not be able to discover the true sense; but it were an intolerable vanity in any man to argue, that therefore they must never trust their own Judgments. Some things in *Livy* may be liable to dispute; and yet he may make a clear relation, how *Manlius* defended the Capitol against the *Gauls*, with great bravery;

bravery; and how *Camillus* relieved him, and routed the Enemy, just as he was upon the point of surrendering the place into their hands. That Book of *Tully's*, which I mentioned, may have some obscurities in it, and yet I may be sure enough that he declares plainly against all manner of fraud and injustice, lying and equivocation, and other crimes, which have been more favourably dealt with, by some later Casuists. Plain things will shew themselves by their own light; and if a perverse man should attempt to perswade me they are obscure, when I sensibly perceive the contrary; I shall no more believe him, than if he should tell me it were Midnight, when I see the Sun shining in my Face. When his words are clear and express, the mind of an Author may be easily known; and I am sure very many, nay all necessary things, are as plain in the Scripture, as words can make them; and therefore there can be no reason imaginable why they should not be altogether as Intelligible, as any Writings of humane Invention. When I find the Worship of Images expressly forbidden; I must needs think that prostration and veneration that is paid them in the Church of *Rome*, to be utterly unlawful; and that I can never honour God, by falling on my knees to the Statue of a Saint. When I read our Saviour's command, *Drink ye all of this*, I cannot be reconciled to the Decree of the Council of *Constance*, that takes away the Cup from the Laity, with a *non obstante* to his positive Institution. When I see the Apostle arguing the matter at large, and determining at last, that *Christ was once offered*; I can by no means understand, how he can be *offered* again, in ten thousand places every day, in the Sacrifice of the Mass. All the cavilling and sophistry that can be used, is not enough to incline me to believe, against the express words



words of holy Scripture. And it is this that makes the Romanists stickle so zealously for the necessity of an Infallible Interpreter ; not to explain what is obscure, but to darken, or elude that which is plain. To this purpose they are forced to set up such a one, as may overaw men's Judgments, and make them distrust, or, if need be, deny the truth of their own faculties, and submit blindly to his authority. But this Interpreter, whoever he be, if he give a sense that contradicts the letter of the sacred Text, as all the pretenders have often done, it is a clear demonstration that he is not Infallible. And yet this idle boast of Infallibility, is the only thing by which they create a vain confidence in their own Party ; and strive to amuse the minds of the weaker sort of the other side ; as if because they confess themselves to be subject to be mistaken, they could never be certain of any thing. If this supposition were true, no Man could have any certainty, but only the Infallible person himself. If it be the Pope on whom they think fit to confer this wonderful Privilege ; he must enjoy the benefit of it alone, and all the rest of that Communion must be left as dubious and uncertain, as they imagine us to be. If they please rather to bestow this honour upon the General Council, as most, of late in these parts, tell us they do ; the case will be the same, as to those that are not admitted into that Assembly ; and they that are, can be privileged only during their Session ; as soon as ever they are dissolved, they immediately become as lyable to errors as other mortals ; and so in all the longest intervals of Councils, there is no Guide nor Interpreter that can be depended upon ; nothing left to support their assurance, but a strange *Chimera* of an Infallible Church without one Infallible person in it. So that this conceit, instead of being the only-

way of giving men any certainty in their Religion, as has been vainly pretended, will be found to prove the direct road, that leads them unavoidably into perfect Scepticism. But if they say, as they do, that in all matters of Revelation, such as the Scripture is, our assent must be always grounded upon Testimony; and therefore it can never be firm, and certain, unless the truth be delivered to us by one on whose Authority we may securely depend; that is, one that cannot be deceived himself, and we are sure will not deceive us. This is very true, indeed: But then we have great reason to believe, that there is no such Judge nor Interpreter to be found upon Earth. If they think there be, let them shew us his Commission; and agree among themselves, who it is; and then the matter may deserve to be further considered. In the mean time we are very well assured, that our assent being built upon the word of God, stands upon a Foundation that can never be shaken. The Divine Testimony is that which must give us the most absolute and undoubted certainty. And where that speaks plainly, as I have shewed it does, in all necessities; there will be no need of an Interpreter. For what is plain already, may be understood, without being still further explained. If it cannot, then their pretended Infallible Interpreter, will want another to interpret him, and that other a third, and so on *in Infinitum*; which is a known absurdity, that will always leave them doubtful and unresolved in every thing. But we that ground our Belief immediately upon the Word of God, do rest upon that which is truly Infallible; and which speaks so clearly, that we may be as certain of the sense of it, as of any other Writing whatsoever; and if this be not certainty enough, there can be no such thing as certainty in the World.

And

And now that I have proved, that the holy Scripture is so plain, that it may be rightly and certainly understood, by the help of such means, as Protestants are wont to make use of, all the absurd and ridiculous consequences, which Mr. P. and *Isaac*, and such as they, would perswade us do follow from the Protestant Rule of Faith, will be of no force.

1. It does not follow, that *Whatever any man of sound Judgment says is the sense of Scripture, ought therefore to be called the Doctrine of the Reformation*. They that hold the Doctrine of *Probability*, that men may act with a safe Conscience upon the opinion of one Doctor, may be justly charged with this, or something extremely like it. But all that are of the *Reformation* declare unanimously, that all men are subject to error; and that they do not think themselves bound to submit to any man's Judgment, or Interpretation of Scripture, any farther than it can be proved to be the true and genuine sense of the Text. We have a great deal more reason to affirm, that whatever has been taught by any of their most Ignorant and illiterate Popes, is therefore the Doctrine of the Church of *Rome*. This cannot be denied, by those that suppose them to be Infallible, as very many still do; and yet they are grown very shy of late, and seem mighty unwilling to grant it. But let them clear themselves, as well as they can; we are not enslaved to any Man's Judgment. There is nothing that can command our assent, in matters of Faith, but what is agreeable to the plain sense of the Word of God.

2. It does not follow, *That we may change Religions as often as we please*. For we that ground our Religion upon plain and evident places of Scripture, as long as we continue true to this Principle, cannot Change

Concil. Trid.  
Sess. 4.

our *Religion*, unless the Scriptures themselves could be *changed*; which would be a great convenience indeed to the Church of *Rome*. For till that be done; the Hereticks will be furnished with shrewd objections against all her peculiar, and most beloved Doctrines. Purgatory, Indulgences, and Masses for the Dead, with a great many more of the same stamp, must run an apparent hazard of being utterly lost. And therefore, to prevent so great a mischief, she has done whatever lay in her power to effect such a *Change*; by voting the vulgar Latin to be Authentick; in opposition to all other Translations, and the original it self; and by making unwritten Traditions of equal Authority with the written word. And as to their *Religion*, we are sure they have *changed* it from what it was in the Apostles dayes; and for several Ages after that. They have been continually *Changing*, till the greatest *Change* was brought in by the Council of *Trent*; which made many things necessary to be believed, which had never been determined before. Since that, the Bishop of *Meaux*, and some others, have introduced another *Change*; and indeed, have endeavoured to refine some of the grosser errors of Popery, and make them look as near as was possible, like the Protestant Opinions; and, it may be, when they shall find it expedient for their Cause, they will pluck off the disguise, and let them appear in their native Colours again. Our Rule is fixt, and we cannot vary from it: But they that make their Faith to depend upon Popes and Councils, may alter often, and do not know what kind of *Religion* may be made for them, when such an Assembly shall meet next.

3. It does not follow, *That the allowing private persons to understand, or Interpret Scripture, is an Inlet to all Heresy; much less to Turcism, Judaism, Paganism,*  
and

and *Atheism* it self. For the Scripture, as has been proved, is so plain in all things necessary, that it may be understood by men of ordinary capacities. And then it will seem exceeding strange, that that which was appointed, and so admirably fitted, by God himself, for the instructing and guiding us in the way of Salvation, should be made the great pretended occasion of leading us into the most profane and damnable errors. It is certainly the ignorance of the Scriptures, that is the true cause of all such mistakes. So our blessed Saviour told the *Sadducees*, in the great Article of the Resurrection, *Ye do err, not knowing the Scri-* Mat. 22. 29.  
*ptures.* And how well they that are always boasting of their Infallibility, and endeavouring, by all the devices imaginable, to fright the people from reading the Scriptures, have preserved themselves from those inconveniencies they would charge upon us, is notorious enough to all the World. The Worship they give the Virgin *Mary*, is not inferiour to that which was paid her by the *Collyridians*; and therefore if it were only for this, I do not see how they can escape the imputation of *Herefy*. For *Turcism*, I will not inquire what near approaches they may make unto it; but I am sure they have a wonderful confidence in their Popes, and other Guides, that do not appear to have been divinely inspired, any more than *Mahomet*. *Judaism* they exceed in the number and obscurity of their Ceremonies; and their whole Religion is nothing else but a strange medly of *Paganism* and Christianity. A learned Man, of their own Communion, has observed long since, that *many*, in his time, *did worship the Saints* and Vices in  
*no otherwise than they did God himself; and that he did not see what difference there was in many things, betwixt the opinion they had of the Saints, and that which the Gentiles thought of their Gods.* What progress they have made

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made in *Atheism*, I leave to be determined by those Travellers, that have taken the exactest view of *Rome*, and *Italy*, and other places, where Popery has not been ashamed to shew it self in its own proper drefs.

Thus all the Absurdities they strive to fix upon us, might be easily turned upon themselves. But there cannot be any of those ill consequences drawn from our opinion, who make *Scripture rightly understood, the only Rule and measure of our Faith.*

I come now to consider the *Popish way of Interpreting Scripture*; and what is their *Rule of Faith*. *Isaac* tells us, that it is *Scripture as Interpreted by the Pope and Council, or their Church*. But he is as much mistaken in their own *Rule*, as he was in ours. For they do not esteem the *Scripture* alone to be the adequate *Rule of Faith*, but think that part of it is contained in *Unwritten Traditions*. And then for the *Interpretation of Scripture*, he is deficient again; for he takes no notice of the *Unanimous consent of the Fathers*; against which the Council of *Trent* forbids any *Interpretation* to be made. And *Pius* the Fourth goes something further, and commands the whole Clergy, and all Regulars, of what order soever, to take a formal Oath, that they will *Interpret the Scripture*, not only *not against*, but *according to the unanimous consent of the Fathers*. For what reason he did not think fit to make mention of this, I cannot tell; but we may see how far his credit is to be depended upon, that has not only foully misrepresented his Adversaries opinion, but given a false and imperfect account of the known Doctrine of his own Church. But I shall not take any farther advantage against him for this, whether it were an ignorant, or a willful mistake. But when we hear

Pag. 22.

Conc. Trid.  
Sess. 4.

ibid.

*Nec eam [scripturam] unquam nisi juxta unanimum consensum patrum accipiam & interpretabor.*  
Bull. Pii. 4. super form. Juram.



hear not only these idle *Dialogue-makers*, but far more considerable men of the same Communion, perpetually vaunting of their sure way of *Interpreting Scripture*, and treating the Protestants with so much contempt; a man could scarce imagine any thing less, than that all the antient *Popes* and *Fathers*, and *Councils*, were on their side; and that they were possessed of some Infallible Exposition on the whole Bible, that should presently put an end to all Disputes, by giving us the undoubted sense of every controverted Text. This indeed might have been reasonably expected after so much boasting, as we have had about it. But it must needs be a very strange surprize, to find our selves so miserably disappointed. For notwithstanding all their confidence, and vain-glory, their Church, which would fain arrogate to it self the sole power of *Interpreting Scripture*, has not been pleased to oblige the World with any Authentick Commentary on the Word of God, in more than sixteen hundred years. There is not yet so much as one Manuscript Copy of such a Writing to be found, in any Corner of all the *Vatican*. If they have such an incomparable Talent of Infallibility, as they are wont to talk of, let their Popes and Councils consider what account they will give of it; and how they can be able to justify themselves, that have kept it so closely wrapp'd up in a Napkin, for so many Ages. This is certain, whoever has, their Authors, that have given us an infinite number of huge Volumes of Annotations, and Commentaries on the Bible, have had but little benefit by it. They may brag sometimes of the *Interpretation of the Church*, but they are glad at last, to make the best they can of their own. They proceed in the same manner almost as we do, they apply themselves to the same studies, make use of the same helps, they

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they have the same differences of opinion, the same uncertainty in some obscure and difficult places; they have not the least advantage here, except their confidence, above the poor; despised, fallible Hereticks. They cannot but be sensible enough of this, and therefore I verily believe the wisest of them could be contented to part with that imaginary *Interpretation of Popes and Councils*; if it were not for the sake of the second Commandment, and some other passages, that look with a very ill Aspect upon the modern Romanist, and are not to be outfaced by any thing, but such *Popes* as *Hildebrand*, and such *Councils* as that of *Trent*. But I will briefly examine the matter, and shew,

I. That they have not any such *Interpretation* as they pretend to.

II. That if they had, it would be as much exposed to their own objections as ours is.

### I.

That they have not any such *Interpretation* as they pretend to, is very apparent, because they have not yet been able to produce it; and it is well known, that the *Scripture* has never been *Interpreted* by *Popes*, and *Councils*, and such an *unanimous consent of Fathers*, as must be supposed; if they ever hope to support their cause, by that Authority. Besides, they themselves have impaired the credit of those Testimonies they are wont to alledge; by their *Indices Expurgatorii*, and other Practices. The *Decretal Epistles* of the first and best of their *Popes*, are all of them notorious Forgeries. They made an early attempt to falsify the *Council of Nice*, in favour of the pretended Jurisdiction of *Rome*, and were resolutely opposed, and shamefully detected by the *African Bishops*; of which the famous

famous St. *Austin* was one. In prosecution of the same design, they did endeavour, but in the last Age, to obtrude upon us, I know not how many Canons more, which they would have us believe, were found somewhere, in an antient Arabick Manuscript. Nay, they have gone farther, and ventured to give us the Acts of some *Councils*, that never were; as that of *Sinuessa* in particular: where they make *Marcellinus* tell a wise Tale; only to exempt the Bishop of *Rome*, from being judged by any Power upon Earth. As for the *Fathers*, they strive to suppress, whatever they discover to make against them; of which we have a fresh instance, in St. *Chrysostom's* Epistle to *Cæsarius*: They have published so many dubious, and supposititious Writings, under their names; they have expunged, and inserted so many passages in those that are genuine, that we might have just exceptions against the Witnesses they bring, if we were desirous to decline the Tryal. But notwithstanding all the fraudulent Arts they have used, they have left us Evidence enough still to condemn themselves. I shall therefore go on to what I undertook to prove, that they have no such *Interpretation*, as they are wont to boast of.

1. Their *Popes* some of them have been accused, and convicted of Heresy; some of them have been men of loose and Atheistical Principles, as the most learned and ingenious of their own Authors have confessed; and those that have endeavoured it, have not been able to palliate their crimes. And I hope they will excuse us, if we do not think our selves obliged to look upon these, as the soundest *Interpreters* of the holy Scripture. But these, and all the rest put together, have not gone about to explain one quarter of the sacred Text, at least in any of their Books that

are now extant. And what excellent Expositors some of them have been, may be easily conjectured, from the admirable applications they have made of some certain places, which they have had occasion to produce, for the confirmation of no less a point than their own boundless and unaccountable Authority. I shall seek no farther for instances, than the two celebrated *Decretals*, the one of *Innocent* the third, the other of *Boniface* the eighth. I will not take notice of *Pasce Oves*, which they both alledge, and urge it both to the very same purpose; and it is the place that is the most insisted on to this day, by the most zealous Champions of the Papal greatness. But that which I take to be *Innocent's* own peculiar discovery, is the unfolding the Mystery of the *two great Lights*, which he makes to signify the Pontifical, and the Regal Power, and from hence he proves it undeniably, as every good Catholick would guess, that *there is as much difference betwixt Popes and Emperours, as there is betwixt the Sun and the Moon*. I omit the Glosses upon this Exposition, wherein they have indeavoured to find out the exact proportion the two Powers bear the one to the other; of which they have made several Calculations, according to the skill they had in Astronomy. There is another that is sent us out of the same Forge, it is on that of *Jeremy*: See, *I have this day set thee over the Nations, and over the Kingdoms, to root out, and to pull down, &c.* He tells the Greek Emperour, to whom he writes, that *he might have understood the Prerogative of the Priesthood, from that which was spoken, not by any one, but by God; not to a King, but a Priest; not to one descended from the Royal, but the Sacerdotal Line; to wit, from the Priests that were in Anathoth*: and then he repeats the words that I have already recited, to shew the pre-eminence of the spiritual

Decretal. lib.  
1. Tit. 38.  
c. 6.

Jer. I. 10.

Decr. ib.

ritual Power above the Temporal. *Innocent* I believe was the first that ever attempted to prove this from that place; but his *Interpretation* was liked so well, that it has been taken up since by two of his Successors. *Boniface* the Eighth makes use of it for the carrying on the same design; and *Pius* the Fifth grounds his *Declaratory Sentence* against *Queen Elizabeth*, upon the same Foundation. Here are no less than three *Popes*, if there be no more, that think they are invested, by vertue of these words, with such a Power over *Nations and Kingdoms*, as it is certain *Jeremy* himself never had; which is as far from the mind of the holy Prophet, as it was from his that inspired him. But *Boniface* strengthens this argument out of the New Testament too, and will prove, that *The inferiour spiritual Power is to be judged by the superiour; but the supream, which we must know he thought was himself, cannot be judged by any, but God alone.* And how do we think does he make this out? Why, the Text is clear, the Apostle says, *He that is spiritual judgeth all things, but he himself is judged of none.* It will not be necessary to inquire particularly how consonant these senses are to the true meaning of the several Texts; nor how agreeable to the antient and their own best Expositors. This little specimen I have given, may be sufficient to convince us, how far they had been to be trusted, if their *Popes* had *Interpreted* the whole Bible at the same rate. But, it may be, they will now tell us, they do not so much regard the Judgment of the *Pope*, unless it be in conjunction with a *Council*.

2. I shall therefore examine the *Interpretation* of their *Councils*, and see whether we may expect better satisfaction from them. And before it can be reasonably required that we should give up our understandings to their determinations, there are a great many

Extrav. l. 1.  
Tit. 2. c. 1.  
Bulla Pii 5.  
contr. Eliz.

Extrav. ib.

1 Cor. 2. 15.

considerable questions to be resolved. What it is that makes *Councils* to be truly general? By whom they are to be called, and how confirmed? When we may be secured that they proceeded *Conciliariter*? Whether they be *Approbata*, or *Reprobata*? or *partim Approbata*, and *partim Reprobata*? And if so, what part of them we are to receive, and what we must reject? These and many more are but preliminary doubts; which yet it is necessary to have substantially decided, before we can come to the merits of the cause. And suppose we were able to overcome them, and clear our selves of these perplexities, which have always puzzled the greatest men in the Church of *Rome*; yet our condition would be much the same, as to the main point; we should be as far as ever still, from the true understanding of the Scriptures; for all the help the *Councils* can afford us. For we know their *Councils* have hardly *Interpreted* so much as their *Popes*. If all the places that have been expounded by all the *Councils*, those that we receive, and those that they would impose upon us, were laid together, they would scarce exceed the length of an ordinary Chapter. Or if they should happen to be something more, they would all be but very little, in comparison of the whole. And if we should grant that that little was always rightly *Interpreted*, they might then think themselves sufficiently assured, of so much as their *Councils* had already Explained; but for all the rest of the Bible, they would make it in a manner perfectly useless. For by their own Principle, they must be as ignorant, and uncertain of the true meaning of it, as they persuade themselves the Protestants are. But the truth is, they are not so much concerned to have the Scripture understood, as to possess the World with a strong opinion of the obscurity of it; and the great danger



danger of misinterpretation. And when they have got men into the dark, and put them in a fright, they begin to practise upon their weakness; and affirm with the highest degree of confidence imaginable, that their Church, whatever it be, and none besides, is certainly intrusted with the grand secret of *Interpreting Scripture*, though it has not yet been pleased to use it. But when they have once riveted this conceit in the fancy of their admirers, it will be easy to lead them about blindfold into such Errours as they could never be guilty of; if they were permitted to read the word of God, without a slavish fear of Heresy and Damnation upon their Minds; which they are made to believe, they must unavoidably incur, if they should happen to apprehend any thing otherwise than their pretended Infallible Church requires. This is in short the mystery of the business: They make a mighty noise with the name of General *Councils*, not because those *Councils* they call so, have ever declared unto us the sense of the Scripture; but because, after the Decree is passed, they would have all men obliged, under the severest penalties, to wrest the Scripture to the sense of the *Councils*. This is that they are wont to call *Interpreting*.

3. Besides this there is another thing which they have always in their mouths, and that is *The unanimous consent of the Fathers*; this they very confidently aver makes for them, and according to this Rule they are sworn to *Interpret* the Scriptures, as I have already intimated. Which lays the strictest obligation upon them, to be very diligent in reading the *Fathers*, and no less careful how they differ from them. How conscientiously they have acquitted themselves in both these respects, it concerns them to consider. We know that when the *Fathers* can be by no means drawn to their

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their side, they can treat them with the same contempt they do those they esteem Hereticks. But indeed they cannot be ignorant that there is no such *consent of Fathers*, as their Oath supposes. This will appear beyond contradiction, if any one will but take the pains to consult and compare any of their Writings almost, that are still extant. Those that have not leisure, or abilities for this, may be easily satisfied, if they do but look into *Cornelius à Lapide*, or any other Popish Commentator, that sometimes gives us the *Interpretation* of the several *Fathers*. They shall find them to agree in all Articles of necessary Belief; but in the particular Explication of very many Texts, they will meet with so great a variety of Opinions, that it is a wonder how the Church of *Rome* can have the confidence to talk of such a thing, as an *unanimous Consent*. There is a known difference that happened between two of the greatest and most learned of all the *Fathers* of the Latin Church, which might be enough alone to put an end to this dispute. St. *Hierome* in his Comment on the Epistle to the *Galatians*, had affirmed, that when St. *Paul* withstood St. *Peter* to the Face, it was but a kind of a feigned reprehension; for that, as he thought, St. *Peter* was not really to be blamed. St. *Austin* opposes this very zealously. And the Controversy was managed betwixt them for a considerable time, with a more than ordinary degree of heat; and for ought appears, they both persisted in their different sentiments to the very last. Besides this manifest disagreement, there are many things to our present purpose, that might be observed from their manner of handling the whole Debate. St. *Hierome* reckons up a great number of Authors, some Hereticks among the rest, that had expounded the place, as he did. And says, he did not preumptorily

Hieron. in Gal.

c. 2.

Hieron. apud  
Aug. Epist. 11.

peremptorily define, but only recite what he had read ; that he might leave it to the Judgment of his Reader, whether it were to be approved, or rejected. Which shews the great diversity of Opinions there then was ; and that every man was left at liberty, to chuse that which he thought the best. He likewise mentions St. *Austin*'s differing from the most famous *Interpreters*, in his Explanation of the Psalms. St. *Austin* answers, that he had read none of his *Interpreters* ; but if he had been a man of much reading, he thinks he might have produced as many that might have been of his perswasion. However he appeals from them all to the Apostle himself ; and declares plainly, that he will submit to no Authority, but only that of the *Canonical Scriptures*. And he tells us in another place, that *If the Catholick Bishops, the greatest Fathers of the Church, should chance to be so mistaken, that they should entertain any opinion that was contrary to God's Canonical Scriptures, we must not consent unto them.* He admitted of no *Interpretation* that did not agree with the plain sense of the Text : He had regard to the truth, and not to the persons of men. In this very case of *Interpreting Scripture*, he commends the Rules of *Tychonius* the Donatist ; and abridges and inserts them into the work he was writing on that Argument. And when he had somewhere expounded a certain place, according to St. *Cyprian's*, and his own present Judgment, finding afterwards that this *Tychonius* had given a more probable sense, he approves of it ; and makes no scruple to prefer the Schismatick's Interpretation, before the Martyr's. Which he had never done, if he had attributed so much to the Authority of the *Fathers*, as the modern Romanists pretend they do. Yet after all, wherever they can shew such a *consent of Fathers*, as they talk of, we are contented

Ibid. & Ep. 14.  
Epist. 19.

Nec Catholick  
Episcopis con-  
sentiendum est,  
sicuti forte sal-  
luntur, ut contra  
Canonicas Dei  
Scripturas ali-  
quid sentiant.  
Aug. de Unit.  
Eccl. Cap. 10.

Aug. de Doct.  
Christ. lib. 3.

Id. Retract.  
lib. 2. c. 18.

tented readily to submit unto it : because we look upon them as the best Witnesses of what was the received Doctrine in their time. But then they of Rome can make no advantage of this ; for it has been often proved, and they can scarce deny it, that in the Explication of those places they are wont to bring for the Supremacy and Infallibility of their Church, and the other controverted points, the *Unanimous consent of the Fathers* is clearly against them.

But since their *Rule of Faith is Scripture Interpreted by Popes, and Councils, and the unanimous consent of Fathers* ; it being well known, that the *Scripture* has never been so *Interpreted* ; then instead of the most certain, which they vainly boast of, it is manifest, that they have no *Rule of Faith* at all.

## II.

But if we should suppose, that they had such a *Rule*, as they confidently pretend they have, it would be as much exposed to their own objections, as ours is. Suppose the *Popes* and *Councils* had set themselves studiously about this great and important work, and given us an authentick Exposition of all the Scripture ; and suppose there were that perfect agreement among all the *Fathers* and Antient Writers of the Church, which they think requisite to give us the true and undoubted sense, of all the obscure passages in the whole Bible : Yet we should meet with the same difficulties here, which they pretend our opinion is lyable to. For how could we be sure that we should be able to understand this Exposition, whatever it were, any better than we may the Scriptures themselves ? Why may not God express his own mind as much to our Capacities, as any Man, or Assembly of Men ? Or  
if

if we should allow that it was the Spirit of God, that spake unto us by those men, or those Assemblies, whose Judgment they would have us follow; how can we be assured, that the Spirit speaks more intelligibly in a *Pope*, a *Father*, or a *Council*, than it does in the Scripture? It is beyond all doubt that it does not. For though they pretend high, that this is the most effectual way to silence all disputes, and make the whole Christian World of one mind; yet it is apparent, that the number of Controversies has been rather increased than abated by it. The determinations of *Councils*, which are accounted the greatest Authority, have been so far from putting an end to doubtful and vexatious Questions, that instead of that, they have been the occasion of new Debates; and whereas there have been some differences about the *Interpretation* of Scripture, there have been others concerning the *Interpretation* of *Councils*. The *Council* of *Trent* was that wherein the Church of *Rome* shewed all the artifice and cunning, that could be possibly used; and yet some of the most eminent Divines of that Communion, that were present at it, and had a great hand in drawing up the Canons and Decrees that were there made, have afterwards differed in their Judgments about them; each one expounding them in favour of his own private opinion: And many such Disputes there are among the Romanists themselves, to this very day. Now when any such happens to arise, whither must we repair to have the doubt resolved? If to the *Pope*, it is not easy to have access unto him; and if that were done, many of his own Sons do not think his Judgment in the Case to be sufficient: If then we must make application to the *Council*, there is none sitting: and unless the face of things should be mightily altered, many Ages may

may be past, before we are like to see another. Or if one should chance to be called sooner, if it should proceed with the same Catholick gravity, that the last did, it will be near twenty year before they will bring things to an issue: Too long by much to be held in suspence about a matter of Faith. But if it were safe, and we could be contented to stay so long, what benefit should we have, at last, of all our patience? If we had the Resolution of the *Council*, and the Confirmation of the *Pope*, we might be still mistaken, as we had formerly been; and so on, without ever coming to an end. The whole matter in short may be brought to this point; If plain things can be understood, the Scripture may, because it has been proved to be plain; if they cannot, then *Popes*, and *Fathers*, and *Councils*, can be no more understood than the Scripture. I see no other way they can possibly clear themselves of this difficulty, but by saying, as they do, that an Implicit Belief is enough; that is, a Believing as the Church Believes, though they cannot tell what that is. This is only Believing by Proxy, or rather a meer readiness to Believe, if they knew what it was, that they were to Believe. A pretty device, to make the Infallibility of the Church an excuse for the Ignorance of the People; but the surest way that they have left, never to be mistaken, is to be very careful to know nothing.

I have now shewed that we may come to a right understanding of the Scriptures, in all things necessary, in that way which the Protestants use; that the Papists have no such unquestionable *Interpretation*, as they would perswade us they have; or granting they had, whatever they object against us, would be of the same force against themselves; whatever they say against our *Interpreting* the Bible, will hold as well,



well, against their *Interpreting* their *Interpreter*. But they know they have no such *Interpreter*; and the pains they have taken to extol the imaginary sense of the Church, and decry the private Spirit, has been only to deterr the People from reading the Scripture, or else from presuming to understand it; which, when all is done, will be found at last, to have been the greatest Security of the Popish Cause.

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*FINIS.*

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